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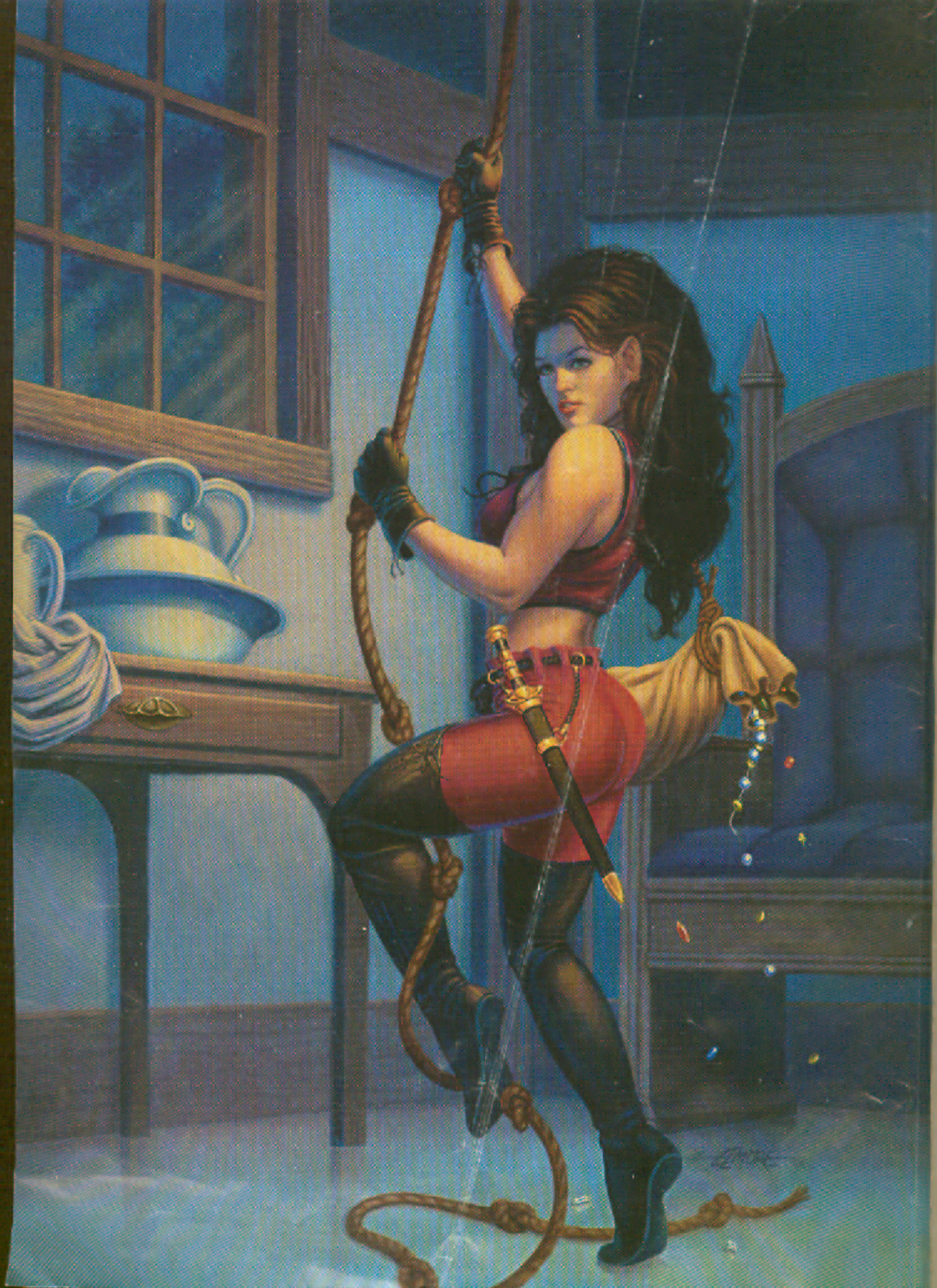

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Halflings have been getting the short end of the stick for a long time. It's only recently that the world has seen what great wizards they make. This isn't to say that they still don't make fantastic rogues—as Larry Elmore clearly demonstrates.

—Peter Whitley

SHORT STORIES

You might have noticed over the past couple of years that I've poked a little fun at gnomes and halflings. Frankly, I've nothing against the little folk. I just enjoy reading letters from players who are outraged that I dissed their imaginary characters.

Their weak and puny imaginary characters.

D&D halflings and gnomes have been ridiculous for decades. You can't blame the original icons. Gnomes from legend and the Brothers Grimm were scary bastards, and Tolkien's hobbits were heroic everymen in a great story, even if they formed the earliest stereotypes of halflings as pudgy little burglars.

You can't even blame the DRAGONLANCE saga, which is where I think most gamers got it stuck in their heads that all halflings are naughty kleptomaniacs and all gnomes are buffoonish professors. Seeing halflings and gnomes portrayed that way *in the DRAGONLANCE stories* was entertaining, but repetition has not been kind to the little guys, and there's a reason so many games have a "no kender" clause.

Now, for a *real* halfling—a *gamer's* halfling—you need look no further than the earliest issues of *DRAGON Magazine*. The "Fineous Fingers" strip portrayed halflings as ruthless mobsters for whom picking your pocket is a trivial diversion. These wicked runts weren't interested in such petty loot. They planned to run the down, and overthrowing the kingdom wouldn't be far behind.

Granted, the Fineous halflings were still played for laughs. For a straight take on an action-movie halfling, Jeff Dee's depiction of Blodgett the thief from the A-series of modules was the very model of a modern halfling hero. Lean, handsome, and more likely to bring an enemy low with a well-placed backstab than to pick the paladin's pocket, Blodgett formed my halfling ideal for many years. Sadly, it was a long while before all halflings shed their baby fat and Lou Costello pratfalls.

Now the new D&D has a great icon of halflings in Lidda the rogue. In her black leathers, she looks more like Emma Peel than Frodo Baggins, and that's all right with me. I'm hoping she inspires more players to run their halflings as something other than pickpockets and burglars, and I have it on good authority that halflings make keen spellcasters and kick-ass monks.

If your new halfling has broken the mold, send us a postcard or email to tell us about it—or catch us at the GEN CON Game Fair next month and tell Peter Whitley all about it. He loves hearing about other gamers' characters and could listen to halfling stories all day long. This year, all of our magazine seminars are scheduled for the MacArthur Room in the Hilton, right across the street from the convention center. You can also find us in the big castle. Don't forget to ask for Pete.

Until then, keep those short, angry letters coming.

Dave Gross • Editor-in-Chief

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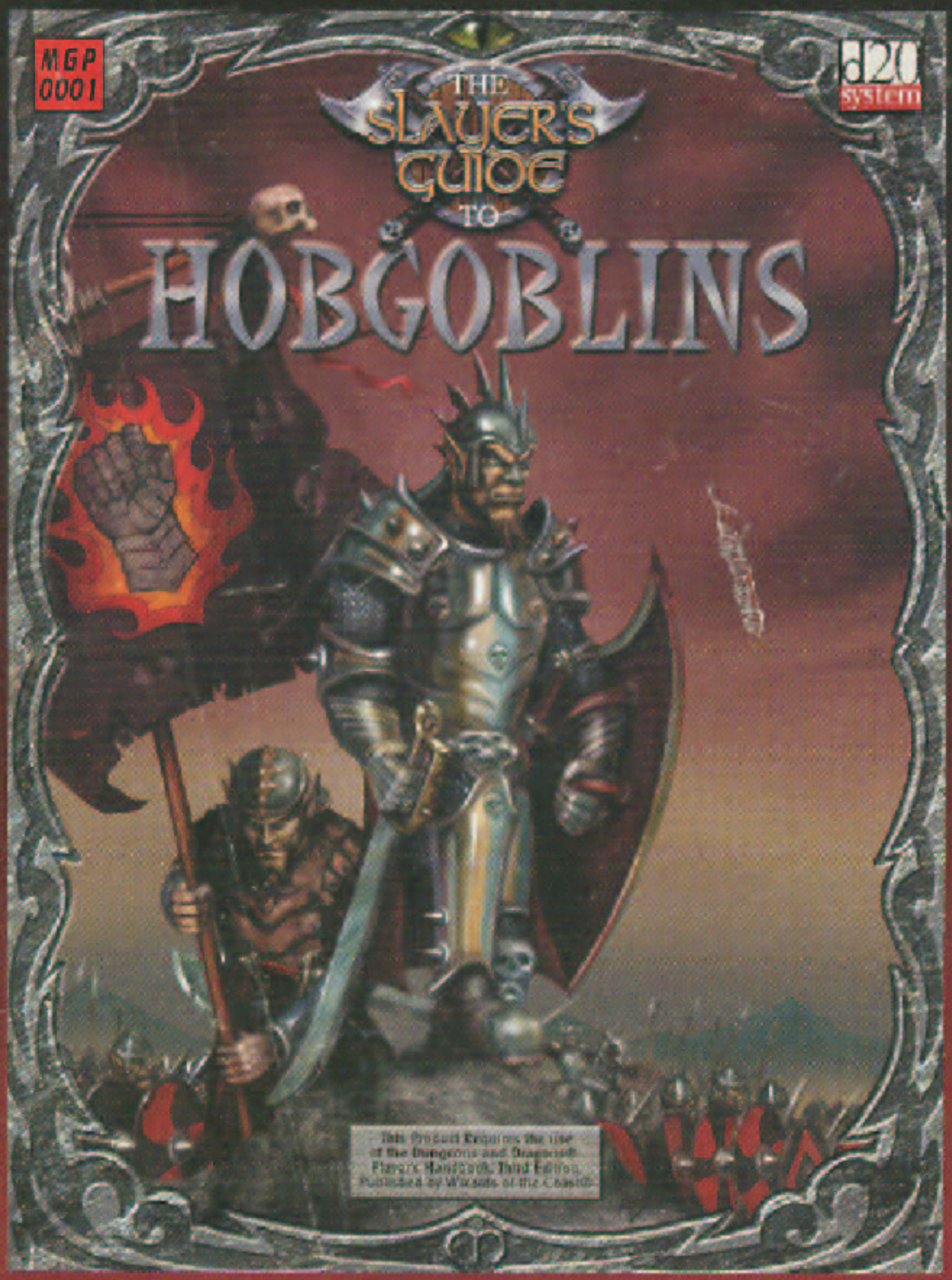
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Pantheistic Goodness

I enjoyed your articles on creating pantheons and mythologies (in issue #283). I do a lot of this, both in gaming and when I write.

One thing I might add for interested readers: A common aspect of Celtic goddesses, and even some gods, is the triplicity, which is a trio of incarnations of the same deity. These three represent the maiden, the mother, and the crone in the feminine aspect. One such goddess mentioned in the article is Morrigan, goddess of death, war, and destruction. Another mentioned is Brigit. The triplicity has a lot to do with the cycle of the year.

DMs interested in creating their own faiths should probably read up on mythology and history, too: History plays a big role in religion. I love reading mythology, and it helps me when I try to write using convincing religions.

I also appreciated the sword-and-sorcery film article—I just can't find anything good to watch. (Unfortunately, *Dungeons & Dragons* didn't go over particularly well among our family; we all were a little angry at the plot and the ending.) I personally can't wait until the new *Lord of the Rings* trilogy hits theaters.

Katharine Mak
Bloomfield Hills, MI

We couldn't agree more about the value of history and mythology in creating your D&D campaign—not to mention the dearth of great fantasy films and television (Buffy the Vampire Slayer *excepted, naturally). We hoped the article would prompt readers to send in their own suggestions for weekend movie marathons, and fortunately we were not disappointed. For example, check out these offerings:*

Movies and Mayhem

Concerning Stan and Mike's reviews of the various movies (in issue #283), I would like to respectfully add two impassioned disagreements and some brief personal opinions on some films the dynamic duo missed.

Primus, I like *Dragonslayer*. In fact I have called it "the best sword and sorcery movie, ever!" It has a literate script that evokes the spirit of its Dark Age world—a world where magic is dying, and the era of cynicism is creeping in. It skillfully creates in its dragon a creature of mythic power, terror, and sympathy as the dragon is old and trying to survive (and multiply) in a world that is rapidly passing it by. Also, John Hallum does a wonderful job as an evil fighter.

Secondus, c'mon! *Clash Of The Titans* isn't that bad. Granted, the cute clockwork owl needs to be melted down, and it's far from Harryhausen's best, but it does have its moments. Sir Olivier makes for a regal yet fatherly Zeus. DMs who want to insert the gods into their campaigns should check out both it and "Jason and the Argonauts" (1963 version).

For further cinematic viewing:

The Magic Sword: Okay, it's got a budget of $.50, and some really bad acting, but it has its moments. Especially when Basil Rathbone is on the screen. His performance as the evil sorcerer Lodac is a fine example of mustache twirling villainy, and helps you forget that the two-headed dragon looks like a cheap parade float.

Masque of the Red Death: One of Vincent Price's best. DMs looking for a great archvillain should really have a look at Prince Prospero as their model. Cruel, sophisticated, decadent, and deliciously evil, Price pulled out all the

share off your opinion

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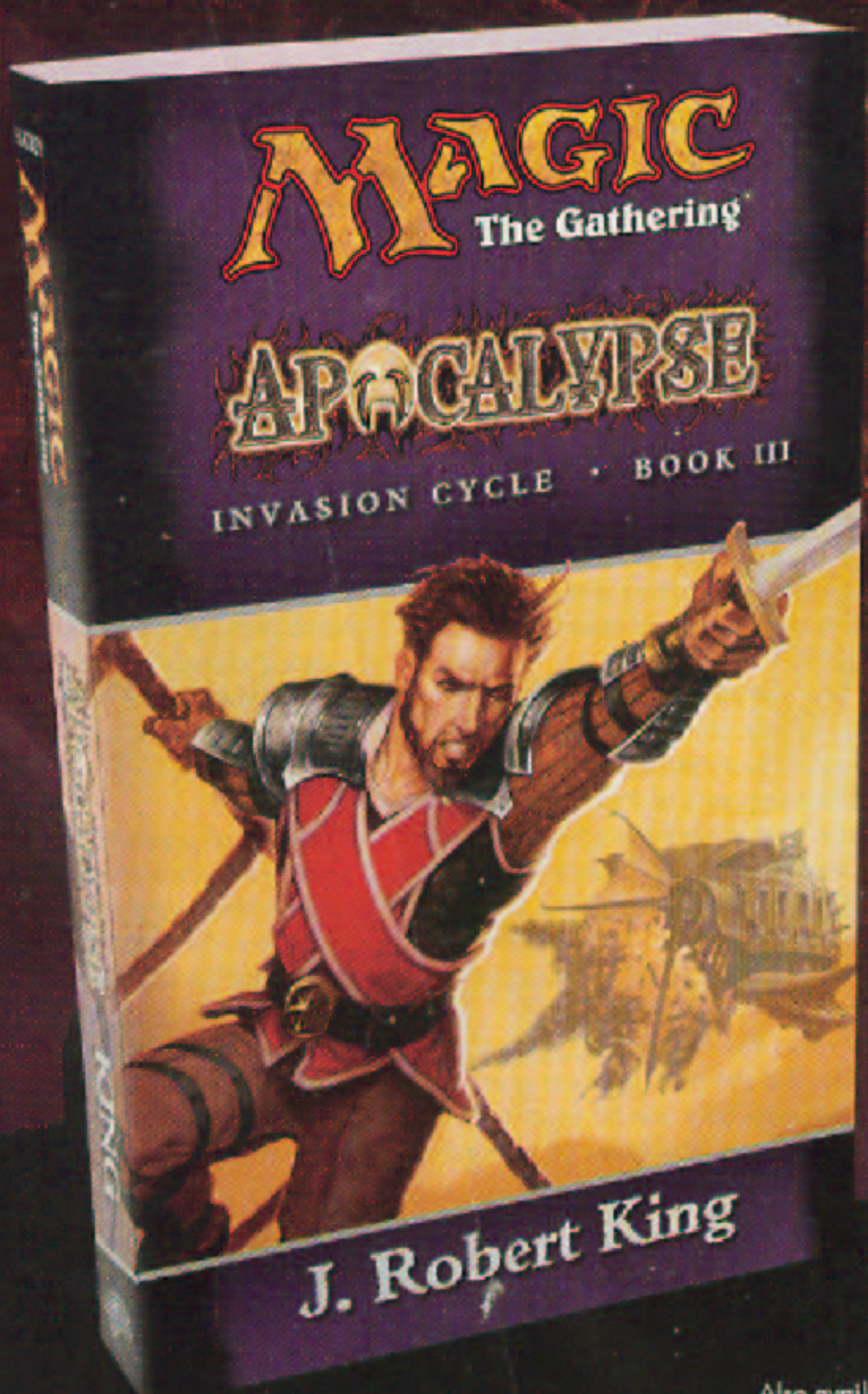

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Game Face

Name: Chris Thomasson
Alignment: Lawful Angry
Years Gaming: One and twenty
Favorite Race: Dwarves, because they're short and wide, and I'm better able to relate to that each year
Favorite Class: Barbarians—rage is good
Favorite Setting: Anything my bosses think is cool (great campaign, Chris, wink wink)
Greatest Gaming Moment: Watching the expressions on my players' faces when I described a reverse-gravity dragon's lair. My glee was only compounded by the fact that a) the dragon was home, and b) so was his brother, a half-dragon, half-skum fighter. The tension during the ensuing 4-hour combat didn't let up once, and none of us even noticed that so much time had passed until the two villains lay vanquished and the hoard was the characters' for the taking.

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stops for this one.

El Cid: One of Charlton Heston's best epics. Proof that paladins needn't be stupid. Some the best medieval battle scenes ever filmed and the best jousting scene of all time are included.

The Warlord: Another Charlton Heston period piece, this time playing a Norman knight in nth-century Brittany. Good exploration of the darker side of Chivalry, as well as an early peek at what some call "the Old Religion." Also, DMs will find the besieging of the knight's tower by "Friesian Raiders" good for some ideas.

I could go on, but I think this is enough for right now. Let's see some more articles on plunderable movies. By the way, the *Dungeons & Dragons* movie deserved to do better at the box office.

Kurt M. Roberts
Address Withheld

Prestigious Champions

The "Champions of Virtue" article from *DRAGON* #283 is the best article on prestige classes so far. Prestige classes that add so much depth to existing heroes and enhance roleplaying so directly are effective and useful. I have some comments and questions on the article.

First, I think that making every prestige class proficient with martial weapons is a mistake, especially for radiant servants of Pelor. A shining blade of Heironeous might be proficient in martial weapons because of his god's domain of War, but why the others? The radiant servant actually loses hit points, so why would the class gain more weapon knowledge?

I really like the radiant servant of Pelor. But the prestige class gives up on average only one hit point a level for ten levels (equivalent to taking the Toughness feat three times) in exchange for ten new abilities (including being proficient in martial weapons). The class also keeps every class feature of a regular cleric (attack bonus, saves, turn undead, spell casting, and class skills)! The other champions lose half the spellcasting levels they would have gained as a cleric as well as losing any increase in their chance to turn undead. I don't think the radiant servant should lose her clerical abilities, however. A little trimming of the class features might make the class more balanced.

I think a toned-down radiant servant shouldn't be proficient in martial weapons at all. Removing the additional domain might also balance the class a little more. I can see the other prestige classes getting an additional domain, since they are losing several spellcasting levels, but the radiant servant might not need so much power. If the class still seemed too powerful, the radiant servant could receive attack bonuses like a sorcerer or wizard, although I'd make this change only as a last resort.

Overall, all the prestige classes in the article are well done. I hope to see more prestige classes that enhance existing classes rather than completely create new classes in future articles.

Charlie Dunwoody
Kentwood, MI

Speaking of prestige classes, we've had several inquiries about the number of times a flamewarden (From "Class Acts" in issue #283 can use the burning hands *and* flamestrike *spells as special abilities. No, you can't use them at will. Flamewarden designer Monte Cook informs us that flamewardens can use burning hands 3 times per day and flame strike once per day.*

RANDOM ENCOUNTERS

The local craft store is a great place to find cool, low maintenance props for your game. Next time you're there, go find some small, round wooden chips and costume jewelry. Spray-paint the chips gold, and put them in an old sack (even old dice bags work well), or in a wooden box with a hinged lid (you can find these at the craft store too). Present this to your PCs as their treasure after a particularly difficult adventure. You'll be surprised how much they dig the "real" treasure.

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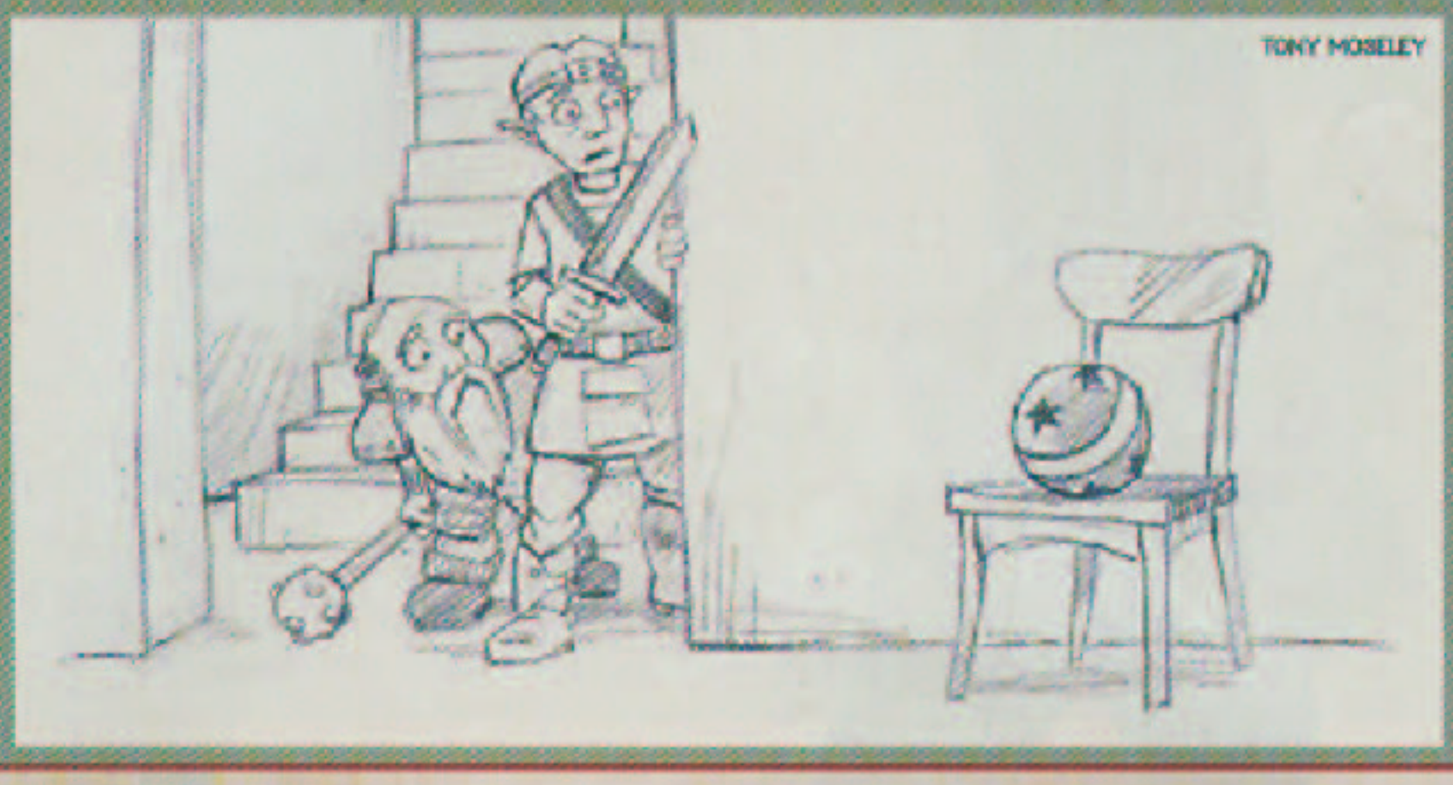

Stan!—Not the Man

I found issue #283 to be one of the better issues in a string of good issues since the arrival of 3rd Edition. I like the improvements that have been made to the magazine and look forward to it each month. However, I would like to make a few comments on the recent article on movies by Mike Selinker and Stan! Basically I am writing to pick on Stan! I hope he doesn't mind.

In Swords and Sorcery section, Stan! makes some valid points about several movies of that genre, but I cannot get over the statement about the movie *Dragonslayer*. While it did not do well at the box-office, in retrospect it is perhaps one of the best fantasy movies ever made. No one has made a better dragon than the one featured in this film. Even the dragons in *Dragonheart* look fake when compared to the stop-motion beauty this movie sports. Also, the movie has more plot twists than a Chee-To. The magic system is well thought out, and the acting is pretty good as fantasy movies go. The dragon in this film even has its own ecology. The movie stays stereotypical while breaking several fantasy stereotypes. I see it as a near masterpiece.

Also, when talking about *Hercules* and *Xena* (Creations of Sam Raimi, the mind that brought us *Army of Darkness*), he states they are anachronistic. Of course they are Stan! It's fantasy, not history. Fantasy can draw on history and do whatever it damned well pleases. After that there is one other thing. In the Not Fantasy, but Fantastic section, Stan! forgets to inform us that *A Fistful of Dollars* is also based on the Kurosawa film *Yojimbo*. But I'm nitpicking.

Besides the untrumpeted merits of *Dragonslayer*, the greatest film of 1981, Stan! forgets to mention an animated classic in his section on cartoons: *The Last Unicorn*. If you discount the missing hack and slash, this film is almost a perfect D&D movie. It has an adventuring party, wizards, talking skulls, old castles, heroes, lots of magic, great characterization, a great back story, and a pretty decent dungeon.

Despite my complaints, the article is very good. It lists for me movies that I wanted to rent but could not remember for the life of me when I entered the video store. While Stan! misses a few points, he got some stuff that I had forgotten about. And if the point was not made clear enough, *Conquest* is indeed the worst movie ever made. Don't see it. Don't even look at the box. It is worse than *Hearts in Armor*.

Aaron Webb
Seattle, WA

If we didn't think both Stan! and Mike had made a few bad calls, we never would have printed that article. It's much more fun hearing about your favorites and how you disagree with their picks. We still can't believe Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon *didn't score higher on their lists. Philistines!*

Join us again next month, when we explore the fantastic lands of Shannara.

Nodwick
by Aaron Williams
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I'M SORRY... I HIRED AN "EVIL PLAN" CONSULTANT WHO WORKED CHEAP. I PROMISE I'LL DO BETTER NEXT TIME!
THE RESULT...
FROM NOW ON, IF THE VILLAIN IS GOING TO DO SOMETHING STUPID, LET HIM DO IT!
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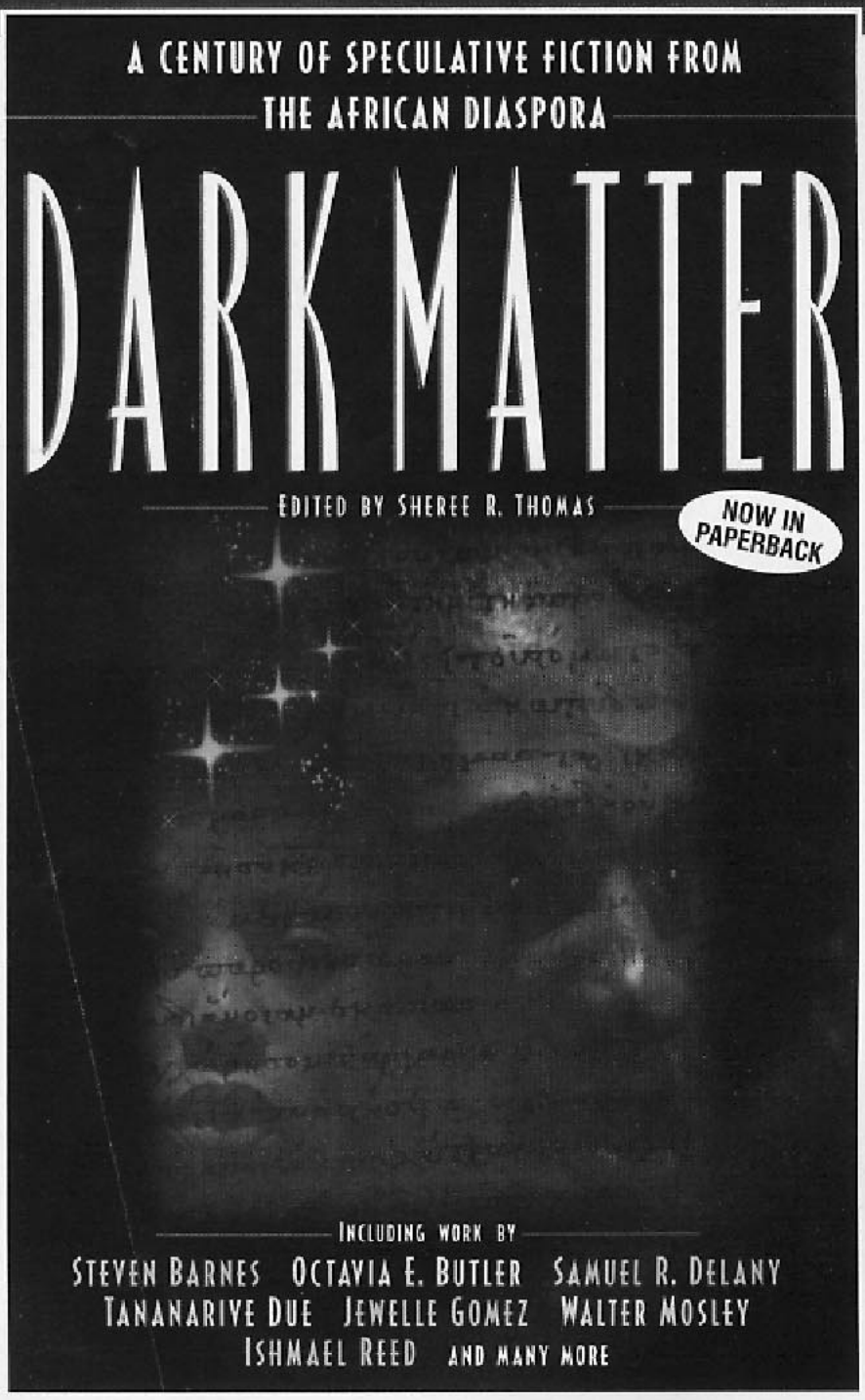
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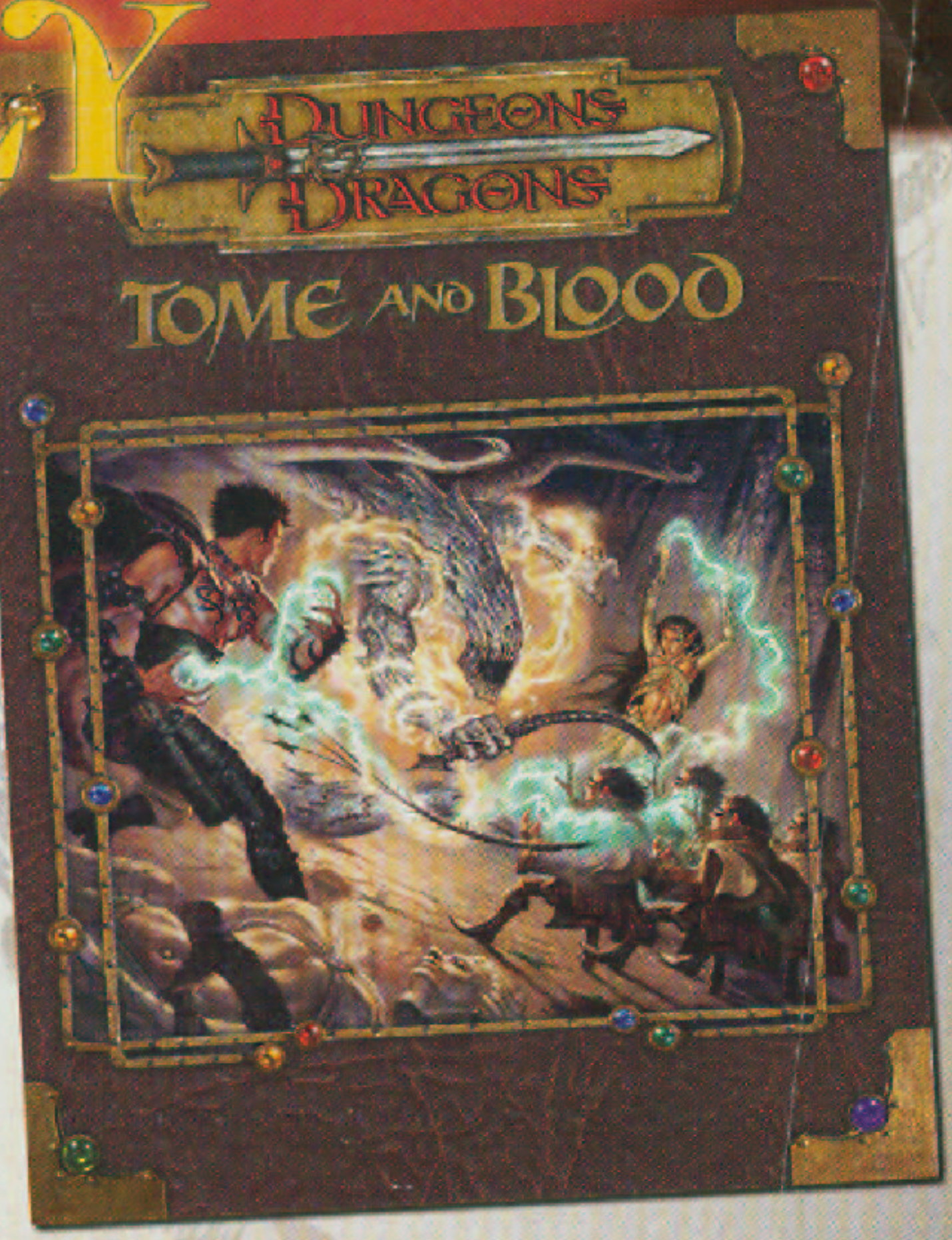

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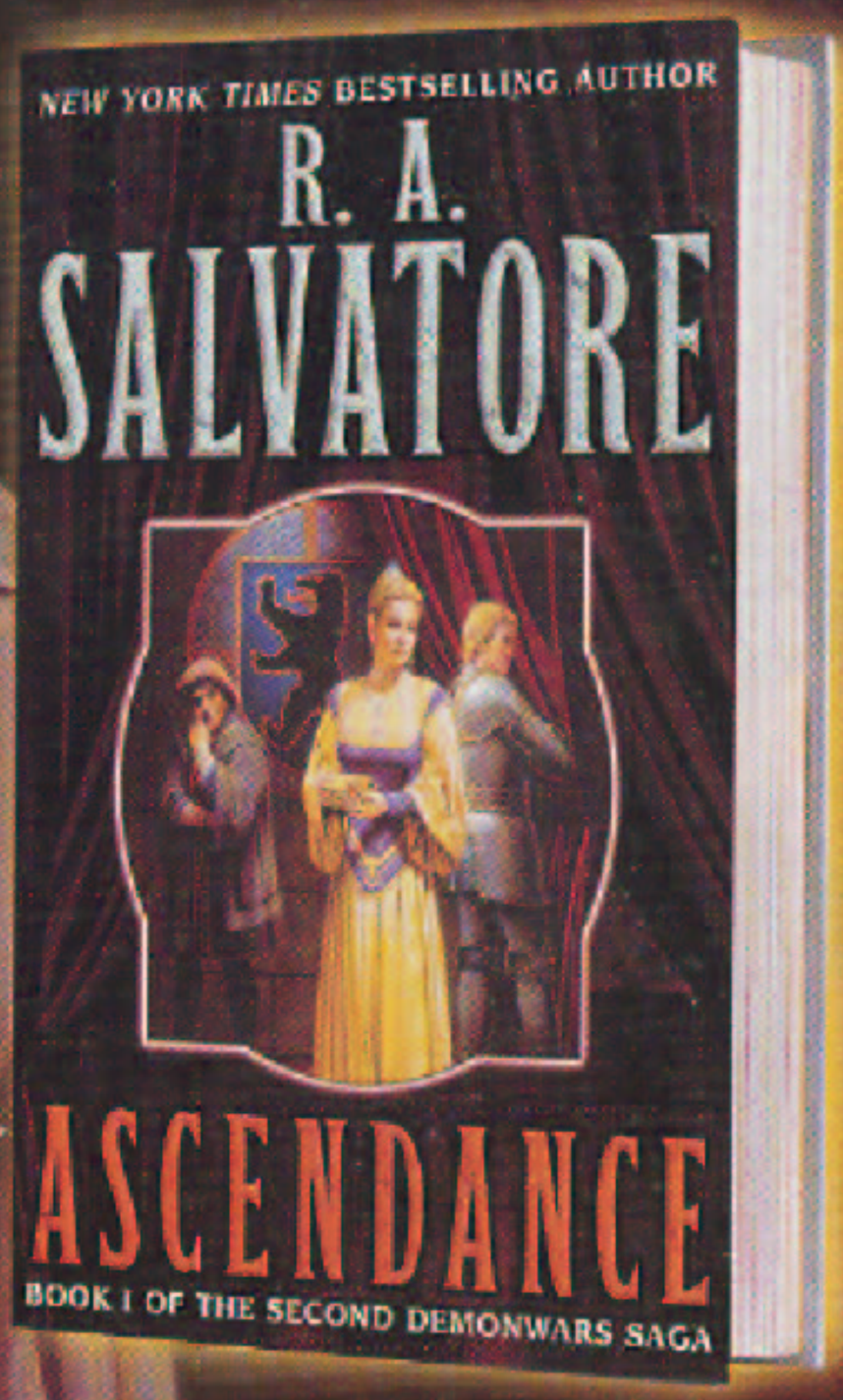

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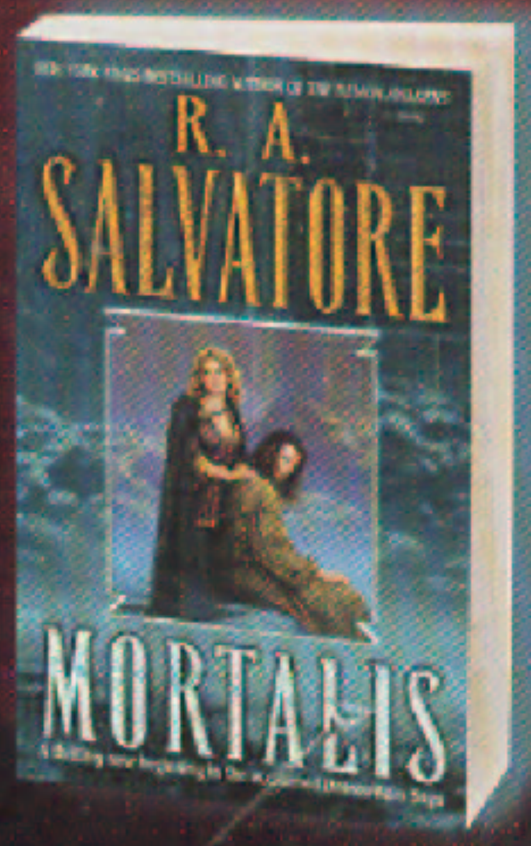

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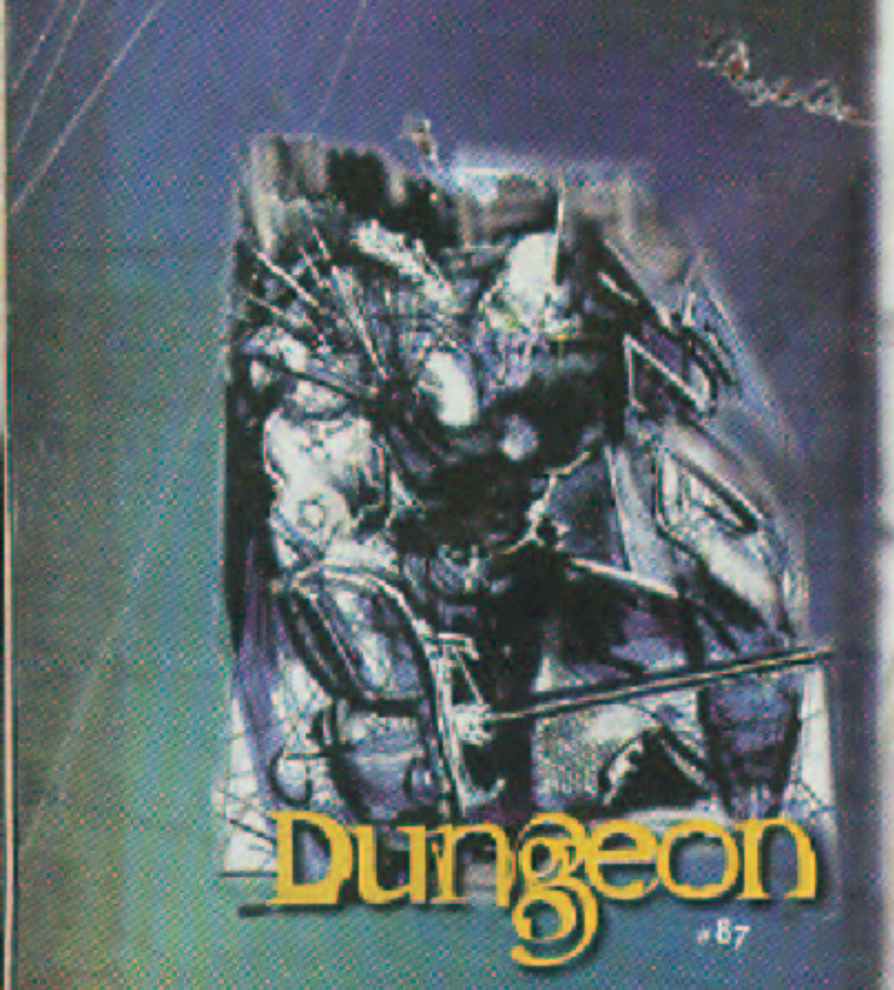

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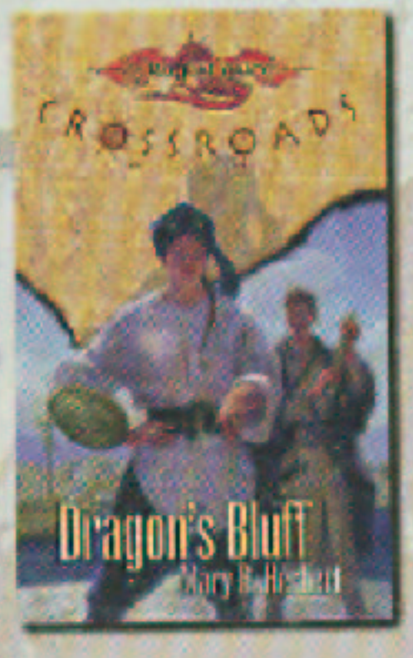

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BY MICHAEL G. RYAN

DAVID NOONAN:
MAN OF A THOUSAND DAYS

It's only been three years since David Noonan began work at Wizards of the Coast, and his list of design, writing, and editing credits is already impressive. Besides his work on all three of the core D&D books, he recently finished five months' labor on *Manual of the Planes*, a massive undertaking whose final results are due out this fall.

Daze and Knights

From the moment he began working on D&D, David had to hit the ground running. He jumped into the deep end of the pool with the other editors on all three of the core books. Everyone was under tremendous schedule pressures to make the deadlines.

His work on the *Dungeon Master's Guide* was just as frenetic. After a pass through the magic items chapter, David developed the treasure tables ("based on some terrific guidance from Monte Cook") and then worked on all of the NPCs from 1st to 20th level that appear in the second chapter. "That was one of the last things we did," he recalls. "At that point we knew we were crunched for space. So I'd design it, take it to Jonathan, and say, 'This is as tight as it can go. I swear it.' And he'd look at it and say, 'You can combine these two columns here, not indent this over here, and that would get you more space.' So I'd go away and do it again, and bring it back to him, saying, 'Only a mother could love this format.' Again, he'd find ways to save space."

The core books were just the beginning. David contributed a handful of prestige classes to *Sword and Fist*. His drunken master, gladiator, warmaster, and ninja of the crescent moon classes have been well received. David credits that success to designing as part of a team. "One of the nice things about working on D&D is that you get to sit at the feet of the masters," he notes. "Though I didn't have a lot of 'formal training' in creating prestige classes, it's a lot easier to do one once you've heard Monte Cook talk through a couple of his own." Like the core books preceding it, *Sword and Fist* kept David in the same state of dazed rush as the project grew larger and larger. "We really wanted to pack as much as we could into this book, and I just kept raising my hand to volunteer."

Day In, Day Out

David just completed editing and design work on the *Manual of the Planes*. The book will please DMs who prefer fewer rules and more guidelines.

"The approach we took with this was that we're much more comfortable letting people do what they've done all along, which is make up their own worlds," David says. He describes it as a toolkit, more so than previous planar projects like Planescape. "All of us are very fond of Planescape," he explains, "but rather than provide one specific setting and saying 'this is the way it is,' the *Manual of the Planes* gives players who want to arrange the dimensions the way they want the information they need to do that. It's really a Lego set for the universe."

That said, David notes that the *Manual* is not filled entirely with abstract materials. "There are probably forty pages of new monsters," he promises. In addition to the return of the yugoloths, the *Manual* introduces new creatures that he describes as "almost Terminator-like lawful-neutral enforcers of justice called the inevitables. They move from plane to plane enforcing the unbreakable laws of the universe, like you shouldn't break an oath or try to cheat death." The book will also include new spells, five new prestige classes, and rules for using the githyanki and githzerai as character races. Most importantly, it allows DMs to work with the "D&D cosmology—the great wheel that everyone's familiar with," David reiterates. "The 666 layers of the Abyss, the Nine Hells—but if you want to just have the Nine Hells and the Celestial, this will tell you how you can do it."

New Day on the Horizon

The projects never stop, though David concedes there are times when he's sure his wife Susan wishes they would. "As *Manual of the Planes* lurched to its conclusion in the last three weeks, I haven't seen all that much of her," he admits, acknowledging that when he adds in his twice-weekly D&D campaigns and his 12-hour monthly *Star Wars* campaign, she becomes even more of a gaming widow.

With David's current workload, Susan might not see him again anytime soon. "I'm doing some preliminary design work on an unannounced product," he says ambiguously (it has something to do with castles). He's also in the midst of editing *Deep Horizon*, the next Adventure Path adventure. Some of his work is on the schedule for this year. "I designed about half of *Song and Silence*, the guidebook for bards and rogues, which is in editing now."

Despite long weeks of fast-paced schedules, he finds that his passion for D&D hasn't slipped. "It changes, though," he admits. "It's no longer as much like meeting an old college buddy you haven't seen in years who you can't wait to spend the whole weekend with. Now it's more like hanging out with a good friend who you get to see every day."

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10:00 A.M. | Kyle Hunter, Pete Whitley

"Dungeoncraft" Seminar (Th)
12:00 noon | Ray Winninger

"Role Models" Seminar (Th)
4:00 P.M. | Mike McVey

Portfolio Reviews (Fr)
10:00 A.M. | Kyle Hunter, Pete Whitley

DUNGEON Adventures Playtest:
"Headless" (Fr)
12:00 noon | Dave Gross

"Up on a Soapbox" Seminar (Fr)
2:00 P.M. | Gary Gygax

"Sage Advice" Live (Fr)
2:00 P.M. | Skip Williams

"The Play's the Thing" Seminar (Fr)
4:00 P.M. | Robin D. Laws

Cartoonists Behind the Drawing Board (Sa)
6:00 P.M. | Phil Foglio, John Kovalic, Aaron Williams

DRAGON & DUNGEON Magazines Seminar (Sa)
10:00 A.M. | Dave Gross, Christopher Perkins, Pete Whitley

DUNGEON Adventures Playtest:
"Jurassic Shire" (Sa)
12:00 noon | Johnny Wilson

"Elminster's Guide to the Realms" Seminar (Sa)
12:00 noon | Ed Greenwood

STAR WARS Gamer 6! Insider Seminar (Sa)
4:00 P.M. | Christopher Perkins

"The Play's the Thing" Workshop (Su)
10:00 A.M. | Robin D. Laws

"Role Models" Painting Workshop (Su)
12:00 noon | Mike McVey

STAR WARS Gamer Playtest (Su)
12:00 noon | Christopher Perkins

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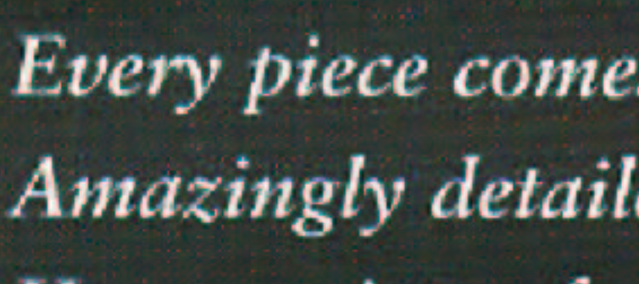

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DORK TOWER

BY JOHN KOVALIC

HEY, MAXWELL! HOW ARE THINGS GOING AT HOME?

OH, NOT SO WELL RIGHT NOW, BILL...

OH DEAR...

WELL, CLAIRE AND I ARE GOING THROUGH SOME ROUGH TIMES...

AGAIN?

SHE'S UPSET AT HOW MUCH TIME I SPEND WITH MY ROLEPLAYING GROUP. *I'M* WORRIED ABOUT HOW MUCH SHE SPENDS ON SOURCEBOOKS.

TO SAY **NOTHING** OF HER COLLECTIBLE CARD GAME HABIT, OR THAT OUR ROLEPLAYING STYLES ARE COMPLETELY INCOMPATIBLE, THAT SHE LIKES WORLD SETTINGS I HATE, OR THAT SHE DESPISES MY TASTE IN **CHARACTER CLASSES**...

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IT IS.

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... OUR MINIATURES ...

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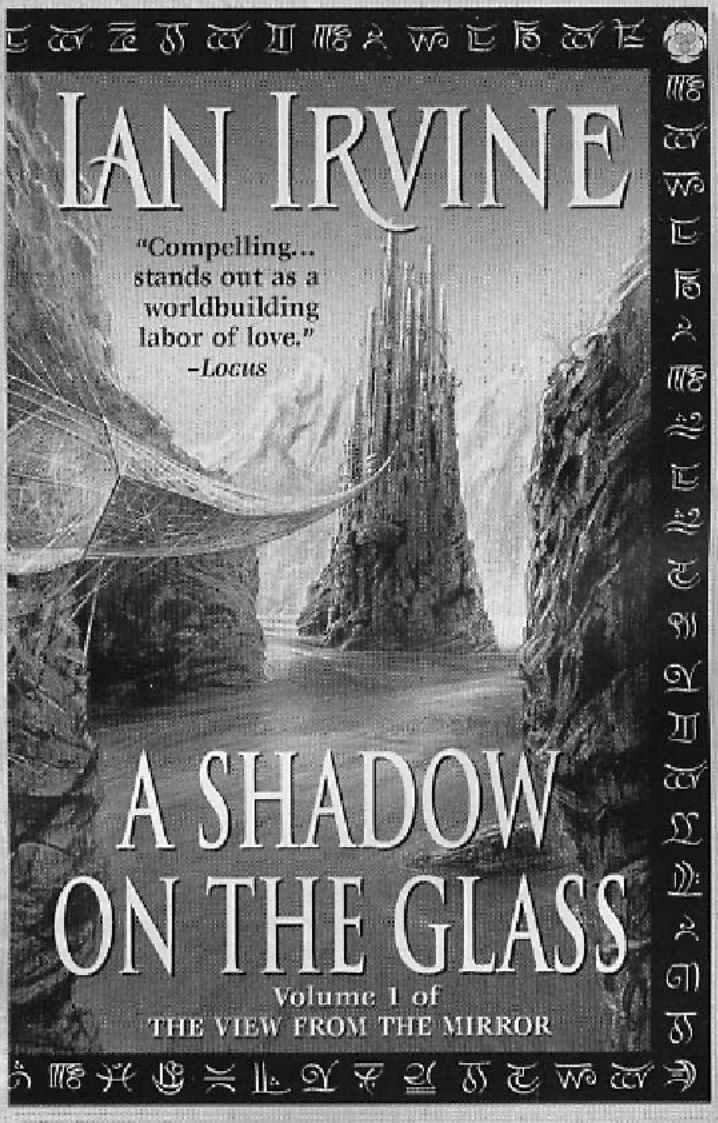
NEW FROM ASPECT

WARNER ASPECT WARNER ASPECT WARNER ASPECT WARNER ASPECT

A MILLENNIAL WAR BETWEEN THE WORLDS IS RISING...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Although halflings are perhaps one of the most sociable races, there are many aspects of halfling society that are overlooked or misunderstood by others. Most halflings live in semi-nomadic groups known as commonwealths, and they strive for lives of comfort and happiness. Of course, there are always exceptions . . .

BIRTH & CHILDHOOD

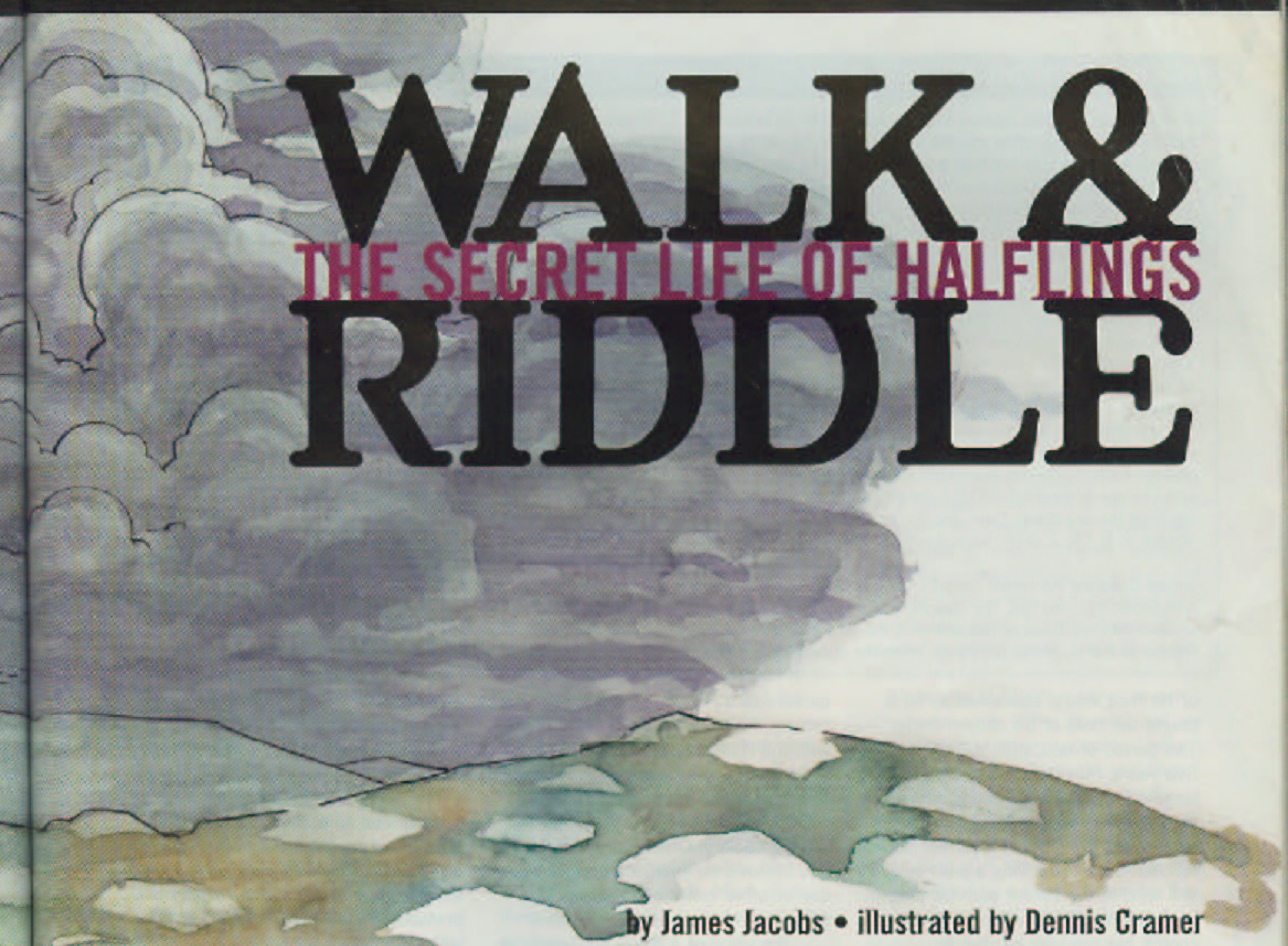
Family is the most important value in halfling society, so the birth of a child is cause for great celebration. A pregnant halfling is coddled and showered with gifts during her term, which lasts for about eight months. During childbirth, the mother-to-be is sequestered in her home and attended by a halfling midwife (usually a cleric of Yondalla). It is considered unlucky for men to stay in the house during a childbirth; husbands, fathers, and sons stay with other family members until the child is born.

Responsibility for raising the child does not fall on the parents' shoulders alone. All members of the commonwealth are expected to share these responsibilities. Thus, the infant quickly grows to recognize and trust the entire community, while at the same time the parents are still able to carry on their other responsibilities with little interruption.

Halfling infants are not named until they learn to speak. Until this time, the parents refer to their child only by such loving nicknames as "Scout," "Sprig," or "Dandelion." When the child does learn to talk, the commonwealth's religious leader is immediately called to the house. The cleric performs three rituals on this day. First is the Ritual of Speech, in which the priest anoints the child's tongue with holy water. The cleric then stands vigil over the child until it falls asleep, at which time she performs the Ritual of Silence, during which the cleric burns special incense

WALK & RIDDLE

THE SECRET LIFE OF HALFLINGS



by James Jacobs • illustrated by Dennis Cramer

and prays wordlessly over the slumbering child for approximately an hour. When the child eventually awakens, the parents are summoned so that the cleric can perform the Ritual of Self, in which the cleric records the names of the parents in the Book of Names. Under this, the cleric records the given name of the child, as provided by the parents. Each commonwealth keeps a separate Book of Names; their religious members keep this book safe and secure. It is widely believed that the loss or destruction of a Book of Names indicates that the community has only a few years left before it dissolves or is destroyed through some disaster.

ADOLESCENCE, APPRENTICESHIP & WORLDWALK

As halfling children grow, they are allowed to indulge their imaginations and curiosities about the commonwealth; the adults in town keep an eye on them and remain ready to intervene if they begin toying with something dangerous. Often, an older brother, cousin, or unmarried sibling of the parent serves as a guardian during this time. A young halfling's choice of play, friends, explorations, and personality all factor into the field of work to which he is assigned during the Masters' Fair.

Not all of a young halfling's life is play, however. When halfling children reach the age of five, they are expected to help with minor chores around the village, such as food preparation, farming, building maintenance, tending livestock, and so on. The child's parents attempt to present such chores in an entertaining venue so the child doesn't grow bored with the work. Often, these chores serve to educate the child as well, further preparing the young halfling for the results of the Great Choice.

Most halflings opt to remain within their home commonwealth and take up a career path. Every summer, halfling communities hold a Masters' Fair (see Festivals). When a halfling decides to take up such a profession, he is allowed to spend the time between his Great Choice and the next Masters' Fair as he sees fit; if time permits, it is not unusual for halflings to go on short tours of the world beyond the commonwealth. Those halflings born in the summer months often feel somewhat cheated that this "vacation" is shortened, but there is really nothing that can be done. For this reason, halfling parents often attempt to plan pregnancies so that childbirth occurs in the late summer or early fall, to afford their child the maximum amount of time between their Great Choice and the Masters' Fair.

Once a halfling is accepted by a Master during the Masters' Fair, most

NEW EQUIPMENT

Footsaw Trap: The first footsaw trap was invented by an industrious halfling whose family often traveled through areas plagued by goblin raiders. A footsaw trap is a bear trap whose grasping jaws are fitted with several thin sawblades mounted on springs designed to cut away at the feet of any captive that struggles. The trap is attached to a 10-ft. length of chain with a good lock, allowing it to be attached to a nearby tree or another secure object.

The trap is designed to be hidden under a thin layer of leaves or soil; a hidden footsaw trap can be discovered with a Search check (DC 20). Once found, it can be disabled with a Disable Device check (DC 20). Anyone who walks over a footsaw trap triggers it; the trap makes a touch attack with a +8 bonus. If it hits, the victim suffers 1d6 points of subdual damage and cannot move away from the trap (if it is chained to a solid object) or has his speed reduced by half (if the trap isn't attached to an object). Each round that the victim takes any action that involves the trapped foot, the victim takes 1d4 points of damage. Escaping the trap is possible with a Strength check (DC 25) or an Escape Artist check (DC 30); failure inflicts 1d4 points of damage from the saw blades. **Cost:** 700 gp (raw material cost: 233 gp). **Weight:** 15 lb. **CR:** 2. **Craft (trapmaking) DC:** 20.

Instant Campfire: An instant campfire consists of a leather bag filled with tinder, logs, and fuel. The drawstring that holds the sack shut is studded with tiny flakes of flint and steel; the sack itself is alchemically treated so that it catches fire easily. When the drawstring is pulled, the entire bag immolates, creating a good-sized campfire within 1 round. These campfires ignite even in moderate rain but burn out quickly in such conditions unless shelter is provided. Enterprising halflings have been known to use instant campfires to set dangerous traps; someone in contact with an instant campfire after it has lit must make a Reflex saving throw (DC 12) or suffer 2d6 points of fire damage. **Cost:** 50 gp. **Weight:** 10 lb.

Stone Sleeve: A stone sleeve is little more than a narrow cloth tube that is tied to the inner forearm so the opening rests in the palm. The sleeve can then be filled with up to six good-sized throwing stones or halfling skiprocks (see *DRAGON* #275 or *Sword and Fist*). The sleeve can be opened with ease, allowing the wearer to arm herself with one of the rocks stored within as a free action. **Cost:** 2 gp. **Weight:** —.

Wagon Shields: These are large shingles of solid oak reinforced with iron that can be quickly fitted together to protect wagons. Wagon shields are sold in batches of six, enough to protect a normal halfling wagon. One halfling can set up a single shield as a full-round action. Two halflings working together can set up two shields per round if they do nothing else. Once set up, the wagon shields provide a Small character with 3/4 cover; a Medium-size character gains 1/2 cover. Each wagon shield has 5 hardness and 30 hit points; they are sometimes fitted with arrow slits to allow those inside to defend the wagon. **Cost:** 75 gp, 100 gp with arrow slits. **Weight:** 40 lb. each, 240 lb. total.

of his free time is consumed as he is taught the skills of his chosen trade. This period of education usually lasts five years. Most masters go to great lengths to make their lessons entertaining as well as educational; after all, what bores the student likely bores the teacher. Upon achieving a journeyman's skill level in the career path (as judged by the master), the halfling is given a choice: He can stay on with his master as an assistant, or he can establish his own place of business.

Some halflings make the Great Choice to go on a worldwalk; these folk lead radically different lives from those who stay and take up a more sedentary profession. A halfling who announces a worldwalk is expected to pack up his belongings and leave the community within a week of his Great Choice. This is often a somber time, as friends and family say their goodbyes and help with the preparations. Worldwalks last for variable periods, but they usually comprise a decade or so. During a worldwalk, a halfling simply wanders where he wills. As he wanders, he picks up skills, tales, and knowledge. When he feels that he has spent enough time seeing the world, the halfling is expected to return to his commonwealth and teach what he has learned. Most halfling adventurers begin their careers as a result of a worldwalk. The return of a worldwalker is celebrated with the Homecoming festival.

TYPICAL GIFTS

Gift-giving is an important skill in halfling society. Often, the type of gift one bestows on another during a birthday or other event can dramatically influence relations between families.

The value of a gift is not nearly as important as its practicality. A farmer given a heavy golden plow encrusted with gems should feel slighted, for example, if it was just as easy for the one bestowing the gift to give a good steel plow. Gifts should not only be functional and practical, they should reflect the relationship between giver and recipient. It wouldn't be proper for a halfling woman to give a beautiful doublet to a halfling man she was not romantically involved with, but it would be perfectly acceptable to give the same halfling a nice sturdy belt or pair of boots.

One special category of gift is the homecoming gift. When a halfling is worldwalking, she is expected to pick up a small trinket for each of her friends and family members back home. These gifts should be easily transportable, since the halfling must carry them with her until she returns home. At the same time, they should reflect some part of the halfling's travels and her relationship with the intended recipient. Functionality, in this instance, isn't as important as something that is exotic and unusual.

As a final note, the act of re-giving gifts is a sure way to earn the ire and disrespect of the recipient, especially if the gift given was one the recipient previously gave to the giver. Halflings who re-give gifts soon find that they start receiving gifts that are embarrassing, offensive, or even dangerous. In fact, it is better for such "gift recyclers" to not give a gift at all.

FESTIVALS

Halflings love to organize and participate in festivals. These events are usually day-long affairs and often draw visitors from throughout the commonwealth. It isn't unusual to see members of other races participating in halfling festivities. Some festivals are thrown for no reason other than to have a festival, but there are several that are more important to halfling society.

Birthfest: A Birthfest consists of a day-long celebration of the birth of a newborn halfling. When a child is born, the midwife presents the child to the village on the following morning. The mother and father are sequestered in their homes for a day while the rest of the commonwealth celebrates with feasting and dancing. Although they

officially last for only the day of the birth, it isn't uncommon for a Birthfest to carry over into a second or even a third day.

Birthday: These events are always grandiose affairs that last for an entire day. The lucky halfling is allowed to spend the morning relaxing in his home as he sees fit. At noon, the halfling's friends and family arrive to escort the celebrant to the village square for a grand feast. The birthday halfling is expected to give a short speech during the feast. Practical jokes, riddles, and surprises are often incorporated into such speeches. After this, the halfling enjoys a shower of gifts from his friends and family, followed by more feasting, dancing, music, and even stage productions. Often, dramatic or important events of the birthday halfling's life are the subjects of these productions.

Great Choice: A halfling's 20th birthday is known as the Great Choice; it symbolizes the beginning of the halfling's transition from child to adult. These birthdays shame all others in regards to production and festivities. During the halfling's birthday speech, he is expected to announce his plans for the future: whether he intends to remain in the village and take up a career path, or whether he intends to embark on a worldwalk.

Masters' Fair: Once each summer, all of the local halfling families get together for the Masters' Fair. These events take place in an open area in the approximate center of a halfling commonwealth; the exact date of the fair is decided by the fair's organizers. A Masters' Fair usually lasts for three days. On the first day, any halflings who have decided to take up a career path since the last Fair visit the many Master Booths that encircle the central feasting grounds. These booths are run by various craftsmen, hunters, farmers, scholars, and military professionals. This day allows young halflings to see and experience what various jobs and crafts entail; those who have made their Great Choice to become craftsmen approach the Masters they would like to work for and present their skills. The day ends in a feast, of course. During the second day of the fair, the Masters retire to the Masters' Paddock, an enclosed area where the various craftsmen decide on which halflings to take on as apprentices or students. The other visitors to the fair spend the day playing games (most of which involve the throwing of stones), feasting, and relaxing. On the third day, the participants of the fair are invited into the Paddock and the Masters announce who they have decided to accept as apprentices and students. While rare, it occasionally happens that a particularly unlucky halfling is not accepted by any of the Masters he petitioned. In these cases, the halfling is generally expected to follow his mother or father's trade. More often, these rejected halflings leave their commonwealth to become knaves (see Commonwealths and Outsiders).

Homecoming: When a halfling returns to his family from a worldwalk, the family throws a great feast and festival called Homecoming. The returning halfling regales his kin with tales of his experiences during his worldwalk and passes out gifts to his friends and family. After a homecoming, a halfling is allowed a few weeks to settle back into a sedentary life before he is expected to take up a profession related to what he has learned.

Weddings: Halfling weddings invariably occur early in the morning and are held outside whenever possible. Unlike most other halfling festivals, weddings are small and quiet affairs. Generally, only immediate family members and close friends of the bride and groom are invited. The wedding ceremony itself is performed by a cleric chosen by the bride's family, and it takes place in a location chosen by the family of the groom. These short ceremonies involve a brief blessing of the union by the cleric, an exchange of marital vows and wedding rings, and a shared drink of

NEW HALFLING FEATS

Nobody's Fool [General]
You naturally think of things in the most efficient way possible and tend to react to situations more gracefully and rapidly than most people.
Prerequisites: Wisdom 13+
Benefit: You gain a +2 bonus all Sense Motive checks and Gather Information checks.

Low Blow [General]
You can get underfoot and attack creatures larger than you.
Prerequisites: Dodge, Mobility, base attack bonus +4 or higher
Benefit: As a full-round action, you can enter an area occupied by an opponent who is at least one size category larger than you. You can then make a single melee attack at your highest attack modifier against this creature, who is considered flat-footed against the attack. After your attack, you return to the 5-foot square from which you entered the opponent's 5-foot square. Using this feat provokes attacks of opportunity normally.

Improved Low Blow [General]
You are especially good at using the Low Blow feat.
Prerequisite: Dodge, Mobility, Low Blow, base attack bonus +4 or higher
Benefit: Using the Low Blow feat does not provoke an attack of opportunity when you move into an opponent's square to perform the attack.

Swarmfighting [General]
You and allies with this feat can coordinate melee attacks against a single target and are adept at fighting side by side in close quarters.
Prerequisites: Size Small, Dex 13+, base attack bonus +1 or higher
Benefit: You can occupy the same 5-foot square in combat with any other allied, Small creature who also possesses the Swarmfighting feat.

When you attack a Medium-size or larger creature with a melee attack, and at least one other ally with the Swarmfighting feat threatens the target, you gain a +1 morale bonus to the attack roll. This bonus increases by +1 for each additional ally beyond the first with the Swarmfighting feat that threatens the same target. The total morale bonus imparted to your attack roll cannot exceed your Dexterity bonus.

HALFLING ENCAMPMENTS

Halfling caravans are often forced to set up temporary campsites on the road when there is no village or nearby civilized accommodations. In such cases, halflings organize their wagons into a tight circle in some easily defended area, such as in a narrow valley or atop a hill. If the caravan carries wagon shields, these reinforced oak blocks can be quickly set up to form a low (5 feet high) wall that can provide additional defense. Halflings train from young ages on how best to set up a caravan encampment; each member of a traveling group is responsible for one specific task, and when the command to encamp is given they fall to their duties with delight. Races and competitions on who can finish their tasks first are popular and serve to tighten the efficiency of the process. A typical halfling caravan can set up a fully defended encampment in less than 5 minutes. Tales are often told of one group of halflings who had so perfected the art that they could set up in less than 30 seconds, but no halfling can truthfully attest to seeing such a feat accomplished.

Weather permitting, the travelers sleep under the stars inside the wagon circle. If rain precludes this, the interior of the circle is sometimes covered with several large strips of waxed canvas that are affixed to the wagons on the edges and propped up with poles in the middle, giving the encampment the look of a huge tent. Guards are always posted in wilderness or dangerous areas. Typically, three watches of three halflings apiece are posted; guard duty is swapped out each night so that everyone eventually pitches in.

wine from a blessed chalice. After this, the bride and groom are pronounced husband and wife. The couple then retire to a private place of their choosing to consummate the marriage while the Joining Festival is prepared.

Joining Festival: While halfling weddings are small and quiet, the Joining Festival that occurs the evening of the wedding day is anything but. Like birthdays, Joining Festivals attract visitors from miles around, and they often last late into the night. Celebrants typically arrive much earlier than the bride and groom; in some cases the celebration begins before the wedding ceremony. For this reason, Joining Festivals are always held somewhere other than the location of the actual wedding ceremony. The bride and groom traditionally appear at sunset amid fanfares of music and fireworks; the wedding feast begins not long thereafter. This feast is a grand potluck; all of the dishes are prepared and brought by the guests. These "food-gifts" often become quite competitive, and the creator of the dish chosen to be the tastiest by the bride and groom is often rewarded with gifts from the couple's families. During the feast, the bride and groom take part in a "wine-bond," in which they actually make a bottle of wine that is sealed and set away to be imbibed on their 25th anniversary. Joining Festivals officially last until midnight, at which time the bride and groom retire to their home. The other celebrants often stay on until morning.

Final Birthday: On what would have been a deceased halfling's first birthday after his death, the family and friends hold a final birthday celebration. This celebration is filled with feasting and tales of the life of the deceased, and it is generally a pleasant, if bittersweet, occasion. The deceased's possessions are given away to family members and friends during this celebration. In cases where the deceased did not prepare a will, the spouse, siblings, and parents do their best to decide who should get what; often, the intervention of the Council is required (see Justice and Politics). It is considered a grave insult to Yondalla and the spirit of the deceased to attempt to resurrect a halfling who has had his Final Birthday.

HALFLING SEX ROLES

Halfling societies don't separate male and female roles to the extent found in most other cultures. Both sexes are found performing similar tasks and working in similar professions in most halfling commonwealths. Nevertheless, there are certain professions that are almost always favored by a specific sex. Legal professions, such as barristers and judges, are almost always held by male halflings. On the other hand, most professions that interact with the outside world, such as translators, merchants, and messengers, are favored by female halflings.

In family life, parents of both sexes act as care-givers for children. The parents usually split the responsibilities as to who cares for the child and who provides lessons and education in early stages; which parent assumes which role depends on their specialties or professions.

ADULTHOOD

Upon returning from a worldwalk or achieving journeyman skill in a chosen career path, a halfling is expected to become a supportive member of the commonwealth. Her skills should complement those of others, and her aid should be lent freely as appropriate. Not all of the jobs a halfling is expected to perform for the family fall under her specialty. For example, a carpenter might be asked to help clean up after a festival, or a baker might be called upon to aid in plowing a new field. Work is more or less shared equally by all members of the community.

There are six career paths common in most halfling commonwealths. Of these six, the military career path is generally thought of as the least enjoyable. Although halflings love excitement, meaningless danger and violence with no more opportunity for wealth or happiness than can be gained otherwise are unpleasant. In some commonwealths, the military path is absent altogether; such communities often rely on the goodwill of their neighbors for defense. The six career paths are:

Military (soldier, scout, tactician)
Craft (carpenter, baker, smith)
Entertainment (minstrel, dancer, actor)
Service (merchant, barrister, messenger)
Agriculture (brewer, shepherd, farmer)
Academic (sage, scribe, engineer)

Each of these career paths affords ample opportunities for advancement and success. Services rendered to other halflings are almost never paid for

in coin. Before any action is taken, the halflings involved agree on how the provider is to be compensated; usually, a good meal is all that is necessary. Sometimes, a halfling offers her own skills or goods as payment; for example, a farmer might reward a carpenter with a winter's supply of grain in return for the construction of a sturdy fence.

Many halflings do not keep money in their homes or on their person. After all, it's only necessary when one travels outside of the commonwealth, and for many halflings this simply never occurs. For those halflings who find it necessary to travel beyond the commonwealth, there is the Commonwealth Treasury, a pool of funds kept safe by the Council that is made freely available to travelers. Those who borrow money from the Treasury are expected to take only what they need. The Treasury itself is kept filled by the sales of goods and services to communities outside the commonwealth.

HALFLING PROFESSIONS

There are no real social classes in halfling society aside from age. As halflings grow older, they often change their professions to account for their increase in knowledge and decrease in vigor. Venerable halflings generally retire from their profession altogether. It should be noted that halflings rarely become weaponsmiths, armorers, bowyers, or similar craftsmen. They generally live in peaceful regions where such skills are not in demand; when they are needed they secure these skills from neighboring towns or cities. While it isn't unknown to encounter a halfling of a profession normally associated with a younger age, it is indeed rare to encounter a halfling working in a profession normally associated with an older age. Here are common professions or societal roles for halflings of differing ages.

Old aged: alchemist, barrister, judge, sage, storyteller.
Middle aged: apothecary, architect, bookbinder, brewer, engineer, tactician, translator.
Adult: actor, artist, baker, carpenter, cartwright, dancer, farmer, merchant, messenger, minstrel, poet, scout, shepherd, smith, soldier, swineherd, tanner, teamster, weaver, wheelwright.

COURTSHIP & MARRIAGE

In halfling society, courtship is often a subject of endless gossip. There is no formalized procedure regarding courtship for halflings. Love happens where it will. Arranged marriages puzzle halflings to no end, and they are the subject of endless jokes and comedic bawdy songs. Idle courtships are fairly common between young halflings before they make their Great Choice. These courtships are usually kept secret and can become quite passionate. Festivals (particularly birthdays) are notorious for spawning such courtships. Nevertheless, they generally last no more than a month and usually end when one or both of the lovers becomes bored with the other, or when gossip about how serious the relationship is growing reaches the lovers. For most young halflings, nothing is more terrifying than marriage. Adults find this behavior entertaining, and they often tease younger halflings in love.

Once a halfling becomes an adult, this attitude begins to change.

Courtships no longer have the secretive qualities they had in youth. The lovers are much more open about their affection for each other and spend as much time as they can together; most of these courtships end in marriage within a year.

The parents of the bride and groom are responsible for organizing the wedding, and this often turns into a friendly competition as each tries to outdo the other. A halfling wedding consists of two separate events; the wedding itself and the Joining Festival that follows. Both of these events are described under Festivals. As part of the marriage ceremony, the younger halfling assumes the family name of the elder, and the two are welcomed as new sons and daughters by both families involved. The couple has complete control over which family they decide to settle down with;

HALFLING GANGS

Halflings understand that there is safety and strength in numbers, but they also understand that "too many cooks can ruin the meal." The concept of a halfling gang arose from these seemingly contradictory sayings. A halfling gang typically consists of four individuals; less than this tends to result in the loss of important skills useful to the whole, but more tends to result in bickering and loss of efficiency.

A halfling gang forms for a specific purpose. For example, when a new village must be constructed, each aspect of the construction might be the responsibility of several gangs. One gang of four might be charged with digging a well, while a different gang would be charged with building a stable. Halflings have a knack for forming gangs of individuals whose skills complement each other rather than duplicate each other. The aforementioned well-digging gang, for example, might be made of a halfling with mining knowledge, one who is skilled at dowsing, another who is strong and hale and can dig for hours without tiring, and a halfling carpenter who can build the well's shelter and buckets. Each sets to his appointed task on his own initiative, but they don't forget to aid the others when needed.

Most halfling gangs disband as soon as their goal is accomplished. There are exceptions, of course. Many bands of halfling adventurers are in fact longstanding gangs. A well-rounded and experienced group of adventurers including a fighter, a cleric, a rogue, and a wizard can overcome nearly any obstacle. Two additional gang archetypes are the footpad and the woodlander gangs, each of which is described in more detail in its own sidebar.

typically it is with the family of the elder of the couple.

Halflings have an uncanny knack for finding mates who are loyal, dedicated, and true. Adultery is quite uncommon in halfling society, and when such affairs are exposed, they are quickly forgiven and forgotten. If a second affair comes to light (this is *very* rare), the jilted halfling has the option to forgive again or to press for divorce. Divorces are quite scandalous in halfling society, and they are dealt with as quickly and quietly as possible. A neutral barrister or judge attempts to settle the matter, and the guilty party is usually urged to leave the commonwealth. The victim of the infidelity is allowed to remain in the commonwealth, but often the other halflings harbor unfriendly views against someone who could drive his spouse to such extremes as to cause a divorce. The two families of the divorced couple grow apart, and hostilities might flare as each blames the other for causing it. There really is no winner in a halfling divorce.

The death of a spouse is a far more common event than a divorce, though no less tragic. In any case, a halfling who has lost her spouse to death or divorce becomes a widow. Widows are expected to remain unattached romantically for at least six months so as to avoid possible charges from the other family of infidelity to the lost spouse's memory. Once this period of mourning has passed, the halfling is free to court and marry again. In practice, however, few halflings who lose a spouse ever find love again; most of them spend the rest of their lives alone and bitter. A halfling's passion is difficult to slay, and once gone is even more difficult to rekindle.

FAMILIES

Unlike most other races, halflings do not possess ancestral homelands. They are a race of wanderers and nomads. Halflings live together in family units. In this case, a family can be quite large, often consisting of up to a dozen different units related by blood or marriage that have banded together for safety. The immediate family (parents and siblings) is referred to as a "birth family," and it usually consists of two parents and around four children. A standard family of halflings can number in excess of a hundred individuals. In halfling society, the family unit is the most important factor; no member of a family is more important than another.

Age brings respect in halfling families. The eldest members of a family are often turned to for advice in times of need, and their decisions are acted upon without question. This dedication to their elders is expected of all members of a family. Disobeying an elder is strictly forbidden, except in cases where the elder is obviously not in his right mind. The punishment for disobeying an elder varies both according to the difference in age between the two and the age of the disobedient halfling. Young children are taught from an early age to respect and obey their older siblings, just as their older siblings are taught to obey the older members of the family. All halflings are keenly aware of their age rank in a family, and this leads to bitter rivalry between halflings of similar ages.

FOOTPADS

The bane of any city guardsman, footpad gangs consist of four halflings who have banded together to burgle the rich and otherwise cause mayhem in the pursuit of their own wealth. Footpad gangs are intensely loyal and stop at nothing to secure the rescue of one of their members who has been captured by the law. Most large cities boast at least one footpad gang. These gangs have developed a complex series of hand signals and subtle facial expressions that allow them to communicate with one another and with other footpad gangs by using the Innuendo skill; this allows rival gangs to avoid bungling up each other's jobs. It is considered bad form in the footpad gang subculture to sabotage or interfere with another gang's job.

A footpad gang is almost always made up of a rogue, a bard, a monk, and a fighter. The bard, monk, and fighter members usually possess one or two levels of rogue to round out their skills. All four members work together to plan their jobs, but in implementation it isn't unusual for the gang members to go their separate ways to accomplish each of their respective tasks alone, often simultaneously. The bard is most often responsible for serving as the gang's public face and contact with the law. The rogue does most of the sneakwork and actual infiltration of the target. The fighter provides muscle and intimidation where necessary, and the monk provides additional support along all three of these lines as the need arises. Since footpad gangs usually work separately to accomplish one goal, it is difficult if not impossible to capture all of them at once. As long as at least one of their number remains free, any who have been captured are rescued at the first opportunity.

WOODLANDERS

Almost all halfling commonwealths count a woodlander gang as their own. These gangs do not live with other halflings but rather patrol the wilderness areas in and bordering the commonwealth to keep an eye on any threats to the area. They rarely interact with the commonwealth directly, preferring to leave warnings and messages along established trade routes for their kin to find as necessary. Woodlander gangs are loners who avoid society and live their lives alone with only themselves as company. The four members generally trust only their kin; the other halflings in their commonwealth are often thought of as wards or children who need to be protected. When these wards are threatened, the local woodlander gang is quick to respond with often deadly force. Despite their isolationist ways, they can quickly arrange for a large fighting force of animal companions and summoned monsters.

A woodlander gang is traditionally composed of a barbarian, a druid, a ranger, and a sorcerer. Most take their first level as a rogue to afford themselves additional skill points. Unlike most gangs, it's not unusual for members of a woodlander gang to have redundant skills. The ranger and the druid often both arrange for animal companions to aid in their duties. The ranger and barbarian provide muscle when combat is necessary. The druid and the sorcerer provide potent long-range spell attacks. Woodlander gangs use their skill overlaps to strengthen their results rather than rely on only one member to carry the load. After all, if at least two people work together to accomplish a goal, chances are better that one of them succeeds. Most woodlander gangs gain the Swarmfighting feat as soon as possible to aid them in repelling goblin and orc invaders.

Just as halflings are expected to share their skills and knowledge freely with other members of their family, so too is material wealth shared without question. If a farmer breaks a hoe he can simply wander over to a neighbor and take his hoe to finish his work, assuming the neighbor wasn't using the hoe to begin with. Likewise, should a halfling need money to go to a human town for supplies he could not procure from his neighbors, he is free to take this money from either his family or his neighbors as he can. Unfortunately, it is difficult for many halflings to wrap their minds around the concept that other races do not share with such frequency. Common is the startled halfling who doesn't understand why he was thrown in jail simply for taking the pretty bracelet he saw in the merchant's window. This concept of sharing is the primary reason for the commonly held misconception among non-halflings that all halflings are thieves.

COMMONWEALTHS

Halfling families are semi-nomadic. They settle down in a particular region that strikes their fancy only to uproot and move along. All birth families are expected to maintain wagons and pack animals to move at the drop of a hat. Strangely, this lifestyle does not mean halflings live in wagons or tents or temporary structures. Rather, halfling families tend to form what are known as "commonwealths."

A commonwealth can consist of up to a score of separate families, although usually they number about ten. The families of a commonwealth lay claim to many dozens of square miles in area; this region usually encompasses the lands of other allies such as humans or gnomes. Scattered throughout a commonwealth are different halfling villages composed of permanent structures and comfortable warrens carved into hillsides. Often, these villages are incorporated into existing settlements founded by other races for convenience. It's easier to conduct trade with outsiders when you're neighbors.

When a family moves, it is normally along an established track between two of these villages. Generally, a commonwealth contains twice as many villages as families. While this means that several villages remain uninhabited, it insures that there is always a place for a family to go. Upon settling into a new village, a halfling family spends several days or even weeks repairing structures and getting things in order. It isn't uncommon to find that humanoids (usually kobolds or goblins), bandits, or monsters have moved into these empty village sites; in these cases, the soldiers and military-minded family members decide whether it's better to force the squatters out or simply choose a different site to claim. Sometimes a family decides to settle in an area that has no pre-established village; in this case, they work together to build homes and buildings for all of their members as quickly as possible.

In times of need, the various halfling families band together to lend support to each other. This occurs most often in times of war but also during natural disasters and other destructive events.

A commonwealth that decides it is no longer welcome in an area might decide to band together and set out as one unit to find a new place to live. These mass exoduses of halflings are rare, but when they occur they happen with astonishing speed. Over the course of a single night, it is possible for every halfling in a 100-square-mile area to pack up and leave for greener pastures.

As an interesting aside, it isn't unknown for a halfling family to contain non-halfling members. Orphans, foundlings, and other wayward children of all races are often adopted into halfling families if they seem friendly or in need of help. Such individuals usually grow up with attitudes quite similar to their halfling kin, despite the fact that they are obviously human, elf, lizardfolk, and so on. Halflings have even been known to befriend animals and intelligent beasts such as pseudodragons, blink dogs, shocker lizards, and the like; such adopted creatures are treated as equals in the family.

Another interesting fact about halfling society is that they easily adapt to the social structures of other races. A halfling family that settles near or in a village or city inhabited by members of another race develops traditions and values similar to that race over a period of several months (assuming they do not leave). They maintain their love of festivals and optimistic attitudes, but other qualities rapidly take on the tone of their neighbors. Most halflings live in human lands so they get along well with humans and are usually considered friends and allies. A halfling family that settles near elves becomes more enthralled with nature and magic. A halfling family that settles near a dwarven clan becomes militaristic and possibly somber. Stories are told of halflings who settle near orcs or other goblinoids and become savage or downright evil.

Finally, it should be noted that not all halflings live in families. A large number of halflings, for whatever reason, have utterly abandoned this lifestyle. Known to other halflings as "knaves," these

HALFLING COOKING

Some enterprising halfling alchemists also become great chefs, as the two practices share much in common, and as halflings enjoy their food and drink so much. Only a few have the skill and funds necessary to prepare these potent recipes; those who do quickly become famous and proud icons of their commonwealth. These cook-alchemists have taken their recipes to the next level, creating astonishing fare with interesting side effects.

Each of the recipes below is given an Alchemy DC rating; this is the number required to prepare the item successfully without also making it into a delicious culinary masterpiece. Alchemists with the Profession (cook) skill who want to make the items tasty as well as useful must also make such a Profession (cook) skill check at the same DC. Failing this second check doesn't mean the alchemy item doesn't work, only that the imbiber might have to choke it down to get the beneficial effects.

Halfling Trail Bread (DC 15): This recipe produces ten servings of spicy, dry bread. A serving eaten with water provides sustenance equivalent to a normal meal. The truly amazing thing about these vittles is that they remain fresh for three months, making them excellent rations for those on the move or as stockpiles against sieges or famines. Unfortunately, the ingredients for trail bread are rare, making them a bit expensive. **Cost:** 50 gp. **Weight:** 1 pound/serving.

Grondiel's Chicken Soup (DC 21): This recipe produces six servings of thick, hearty soup that remain fresh for a day. Those who eat a serving of this soup gain a +4 alchemical bonus to any Fortitude saving throw made to resist catching any disease during the next 8 hours. **Cost:** 70 gp. **Weight:** 1 pound/serving.

Moonmoss Pudding (DC 30): This recipe produces one serving of sweet fruity pudding that actually glows in the dark. Moonmoss pudding is a favorite of many halfling children. This pudding provides a short-lived boost of energy for 1 hour after it is eaten, granting a +1 alchemical bonus to initiative checks made during this time. Moonmoss pudding stays fresh for a day. **Cost:** 150 gp. **Weight:** 1 pound/serving.

Zumzum Cake (DC 25): This recipe produces one small buttery pastry with a minty aftertaste. A zumzum cake remains fresh for a week. A zumzum cake increases the body's natural healing rate. A person who eats a zumzum cake before going to sleep for 8 hours of non-bed rest regains hit points as if she had rested for a full 24 hours. Someone who eats a zumzum cake followed by 8 hours of bed rest regains hit points as if she had bed rest for a full 24 hours. **Cost:** 75 gp. **Weight:** 1 pound/cake.

individuals are subjects of sadness, despair, scorn, or even hatred from family halflings. Knaves usually left their home for a worldwalk and decided that life among humans, elves, dwarves, or whatever suited them better than life with their own kind. More rarely, they are halflings who have been exiled due to divorce or some heinous crime. Rarest of all are the halflings who left their villages because they simply despised their kin. These halflings often become criminals, assassins, or worse, and they often work to bring pain and suffering to their happier kin for reasons only they understand.

SUPERSTITIONS & BELIEFS

Halflings worship a sizable pantheon of deities, but the most popular religion is the worship of Yondalla the Protector, the creator of the halfling race. Every commonwealth contains at least three clerics of Yondalla. Often, these clerics are also elders in positions of leadership. Religious ceremony infuses much of a halfling's life: Quick prayers to Yondalla before eating, before going to bed, and before undertaking risky tasks are common. This religious aspect to halfling life is never intrusive, though. Most halfling villages in a commonwealth include a small shrine dedicated to Yondalla and the halfling gods. In some cases, a particularly important shrine is tended by a permanent staff of clerics. Halfling clerics are expected to tend and care for shrines and churches, but they are not expected to live solitary lives of chastity and loneliness. A halfling cleric lives her life just as other halflings do, in the company of friends and family.

Druids are also relatively common in halfling society. Halfling druids tend to be hermits, though, and live alone in the wilder areas of a halfling commonwealth. Often, a halfling druid is sought by locals to help with a problem with predatory animals or similar situations. If it can be avoided, the halflings prefer to leave their druids alone, as they can be temperamental and unpredictable.

In addition, halflings often take on the worship of neighboring religions common in the lands of neighboring races. This seems to be an extension of their social adaptability. Worship of Yondalla is usually not displaced except in cases where these other gods have values and beliefs in opposition to that of the Protector. It isn't unusual to see halfling clerics of gods like Ehlonna, Garl Glittergold, Fharlanghn, or Obad-Hai serving in churches alongside clerics of Yondalla. A standard halfling attends religious services once a week. Beside Yondalla, they don't usually worship one deity in preference to another, but rather they worship the deities who have clerics in their family or commonwealth.

Halflings are naturally optimistic; they believe that, no matter how grim or horrible a situation might be, things work out for the best if one just keeps a good attitude. This attitude plays a large part in allowing halflings to resist fear, both natural and magically induced. Halflings are strong believers in luck, but they also believe that good luck comes to those who don't worry about things too much. Excessive worry leads to bad luck. Although they can be hard workers, halflings prefer to relax and watch the world go by. They believe that an overworked person is more prone to anger and that too many overworked individuals in one place lead to unpleasantness like wars. Halflings take joy in the little things in life. A powerful halfling warrior is more likely to be proud of (and indeed, more likely to be remembered for) growing the biggest squash in her commonwealth rather than for slaying a dragon.

COLLECTIONS

One of the most unique aspects of halfling life is their obsession with collections. Almost every halfling has at least one collection; truly ambitions halflings might have a dozen separate collections. Halflings with similar collections often engage in intricate trades to optimize their collection, and like-minded collectors often compete with others for the most complete collection of a specific subject. Envy of another's collection is in fact the most common cause for crimes and violence in halfling society. Someone who willfully steals from or sabotages another halfling's collection is prosecuted quickly; such criminals usually face exile from the commonwealth.

Listed below are several common collections. As a general rule, a collection of 20 or more unique entities is considered standard, a collection of 50 or more impressive, and a collection of over 100 unique entities nothing less than amazing. A halfling who has several large but incomplete collections is not awarded the prestige of a halfling with a complete (or nearly complete) single collection.

Halfling villagers: Pressed flowers and plants, insects, pretty rocks and stones, animal claws, bones, seeds, arrowheads, throwing stones.

Halfling adventurers: Coins, steins from taverns, stones from different cities, gems, monster teeth, potions, magic wands, spell components, throwing stones.

VALUES, ARTS & SKILLS

Halflings value honesty, cheerfulness, and creativity over everything else. Stubbornness is viewed as a character flaw, and individuals displaying such traits often find themselves the butt of numerous insults and practical jokes when in halfling company. A halfling avoids lying to other halflings but does not observe the same level of politeness in the company of those they deem crude, depressing, or dull.

The halfling language is unique in that it is rarely, if ever, written in permanent form. Halflings have a strong oral tradition. The history of a commonwealth is recorded in numerous entertaining stories and parables that halflings memorize at a young age. These stories are told again and again at festivals, after dinner, or whenever someone is listening. Halflings never seem to grow tired of hearing the same story they've heard a hundred times before, but the best stories are those that have never before been heard. Homecoming festivals are naturally the greatest time for such stories, and a halfling returning from worldwalk often talks himself hoarse over the course of one long night of stories.

Also popular among halflings is the art of trading insults. Close friends create and perfect insults, then try them out on each other, honing their skills for a day when they might be needed. Insult matches are often held to determine guilt or liability in times of dispute (see Justice & Politics). Crude insults, while entertaining, are not considered as potent or powerful as a subtle insult that cuts to the quick. To a halfling, the perfect insult is one that makes little or no sense at the time of delivery, but several hours later (hopefully while the victim is trying to go to sleep) the true nature of the insult is realized. An insult that does its damage long after delivery is both safe and lasting.

Halflings enjoy playing games of all sorts, both indoors and outdoors. Games are usually a prominent feature of most halfling festivals, and are generally overshadowed only by the feasting. Of all the types of games halflings play, none are more popular than stonethrowing games. There seem to be an infinite number of variations on this type of game, but most of them revolve around hitting a moving target from a distance with a hurled rock. Halflings collect stones that are particularly well suited for throwing and refuse to use other stones in competition. A popular variant of the simple "hit the moving target" version is a game known as "skipping." In this game, a halfling stonethrower must hit a designated target by skipping or bouncing a hurled stone off of other targets. The most accomplished skipping players can hit targets that are out of sight or around corners by bouncing their stones off of other rocks. Another popular variation of the game is called "hit the birdy," in which one halfling attempts to hit a target while the competitor tries to deflect his stone with a stone of his own.

The one skill in which almost every other race agrees that the halfling the master, though, is cooking. Halfling recipes are rarely written; they are taught from parents to children orally and are jealously guarded secrets. Halflings constantly try to improve their personal dishes in attempts to keep ahead of the inventions of their neighbors. Often, a family of halflings holds a feast simply to show off a single new recipe. Stories are told of unique halfling recipes that create magic foods that have magical effects; if this is true, the secrets of such recipes could make those halflings in the know wealthy. Unfortunately, knowledge of a magical recipe is worth more than any amount of gold for most halflings, and many end up taking their secrets to the grave.

HALFLING RIDDLES

While cooking, stonethrowing, insulting, and storytelling are all popular pastimes in halfling society, the art of riddling is the most popular of them all. Most halflings engage in long riddling contests with their best friends. One halfling asks another a riddle and waits for the correct answer. Any number of guesses are allowed, but no hints are given and no aid from others is welcomed or sought. A good riddle can keep a halfling thinking for days or even weeks. Elders often tell stories of riddles so cunning or complex that they drove halflings mad, and they warn youngsters to avoid asking riddles that they cannot answer themselves. A halfling who gives up can demand the

riddle's answer from the questioner; this usually requires the stumped halfling to perform some sort of service for the winning riddler. If the riddler does not have an acceptable answer for the riddle, though, her reputation suffers greatly. Halflings who ask riddles they themselves cannot answer too often are usually scorned and forced out of their commonwealth.

Halflings sometimes try to purchase or sell goods simply by asking or answering riddles, so any halfling that expects to succeed in life had better work on keeping a fresh set of riddles in mind for emergencies.

Three common halfling riddles are listed below. For the most part, any halfling worth her salt has heard these riddles; they still sometimes work on humans and other races though.

Riddle: I have a mouth but cannot speak, lay on a bed but never sleep.
Answer: A river.

Riddle: A goblin walked twenty miles into the woods to find me, stopped to look for me when he got me, then threw me away when he found me.
Answer: A splinter.

Riddle: I've more heads than any hydra and more tales than the longest book.
Answer: A sack of coins.

JUSTICE & POLITICS

Age is the most important factor in halfling society. The eldest member of a family is the most respected and venerated member, and the words of one's elders are to be obeyed without question. Nevertheless, there are times when the eldest member of a family cannot lead the family properly due to infirmity. To rectify this, the day-to-day leadership of a halfling village is placed on the shoulders of a patriarch or matriarch. This halfling is attended by a number of elder advisors (usually six, one representing each of the common career paths) who handle resolutions of conflicts and organize events that require input or effort from the entire family. Collectively, this group of halflings is known as the Council. Selection of new elder advisors is the patriarch or matriarch's responsibility; appointment to the office of elder advisor lasts for life. Selection of a new patriarch or matriarch is determined by the elder advisors, who select the best choice from nominations made by the family at large.

Aside from the Council, there is no official ruling class in halfling society. Generally, a halfling's parents govern the offspring, administer punishment, and so on.

Halflings are fairly easy going when it comes to conflict. In fact, they generally try to avoid it wherever possible. Nevertheless, crime is no stranger to halfling commonwealths. For minor crimes (such as failing to hold up one's end of a bargain, refusing to do one's share of the work, or wasting resources), the offender's parents or elder siblings administer punishment. Usually, this involves enforced labor, confiscation of valued belongings, or religious penance. A halfling can prove his innocence either through quick wit or supporting evidence, or by challenging the accuser to an insult or riddling duel. Halflings believe that the guilty party in such a duel is wracked with remorse and thus quickly makes an error, exposing his guilt.

More heinous crimes, such as sabotaging another halfling's collection of mead bottles, assaulting a halfling, arson, or banditry are always brought before the Council. Halflings accused of these crimes are usually confined to their homes while the Council members hear testimonies and view evidence. The accused can have friends and family argue for his innocence, but he cannot speak directly to the Council. Those found guilty of such crimes are required to right the wrong in some way, usually by giving belongings or volunteering their skills or the skills of their family and friends to fix what was done. In cases where a halfling repeatedly commits these heinous crimes, exile from the commonwealth might be recommended. An exiled criminal is allowed to take with him one pony and all the food and gear he and the pony can carry, and he must leave by sundown on the day judgment is passed. Those who remain in a village after exile quickly find that no one speaks with them and they are universally shunned. An exiled halfling who continues to harass locals is sentenced to true exile (see below).

Truly devastating crimes such as murder and treason are exceptionally rare in halfling society, but they do happen. In such cases, the accused is kept imprisoned in an area where he can do no further harm and is guarded at all times by several soldiers. During this time, the Council hears testimony and views evidence as in lesser cases, but rarely does one come to the aid of a halfling accused of such a crime. Sentencing relies solely upon what the Council hears through testimonies of the victims. In ambiguous cases, the Council might call upon the aid of spellcasters to perform divination magic to clear matters up. A halfling found guilty of treason, murder, or a similar heinous crime is always sentenced to true exile.

True exile represents the height of halfling punishment. The guilty party is apprehended and escorted by armed guards to a distant point on the edge of the commonwealth and left with nothing but the clothes on his back. Any halfling who attempts to return while under true exile is treated as an enemy invader and might be attacked by guards. This is as close as halflings come to an actual death penalty, which they regard as barbaric.

DEATH & BURIAL

Halflings do not cope well with death. When a member of a halfling family dies, close friends and family members spend a day in mourning, during which time they remain sequestered in their homes. Friends and well-wishers leave gifts and offerings of food on the doorstep of a house of mourning while the funeral is prepared. Sometimes, periods of mourning last for several days; in such cases, a Council member has to enter the house of mourning to encourage the family to come to grips with their loss and permit the funeral to proceed.

Once they have mourned the loss of their loved one, the deceased's family carries the body from the home to the site of the funeral (which is usually held at the closest shrine). In cases where no body is available, a valued possession of the deceased is substituted in its place. The funeral proceedings themselves are

long, somber affairs during which the friends and relatives of the deceased recount stories and fond memories. When all have had their say, the body is blessed by a cleric and then transported by the family and close friends to a graveyard. Everyone helps dig the grave, and the body is interred without a coffin. A small pile of stones is placed over the center of the grave, and the deceased's name, date of birth, date of death, and a short epithet are carved on a large communal monolith that stands at the graveyard's center. Friends and relatives then depart while other attendees and clerics take care of filling in the grave. A single cleric stands guard over a freshly buried body for three days as a service to the departed soul.

After the funeral, if the deceased died of old age at home and among friends, the mourners have a grand feast. These feasts are designed to pick up the spirits of the mourners, and they are festive, bright, and cheerful events filled with storytelling, dancing, and games. If the deceased died of violence, pestilence, or other unnatural means before a full life was lived, this feast is often canceled. The mourners return to their homes and continue to mourn, often for many weeks.

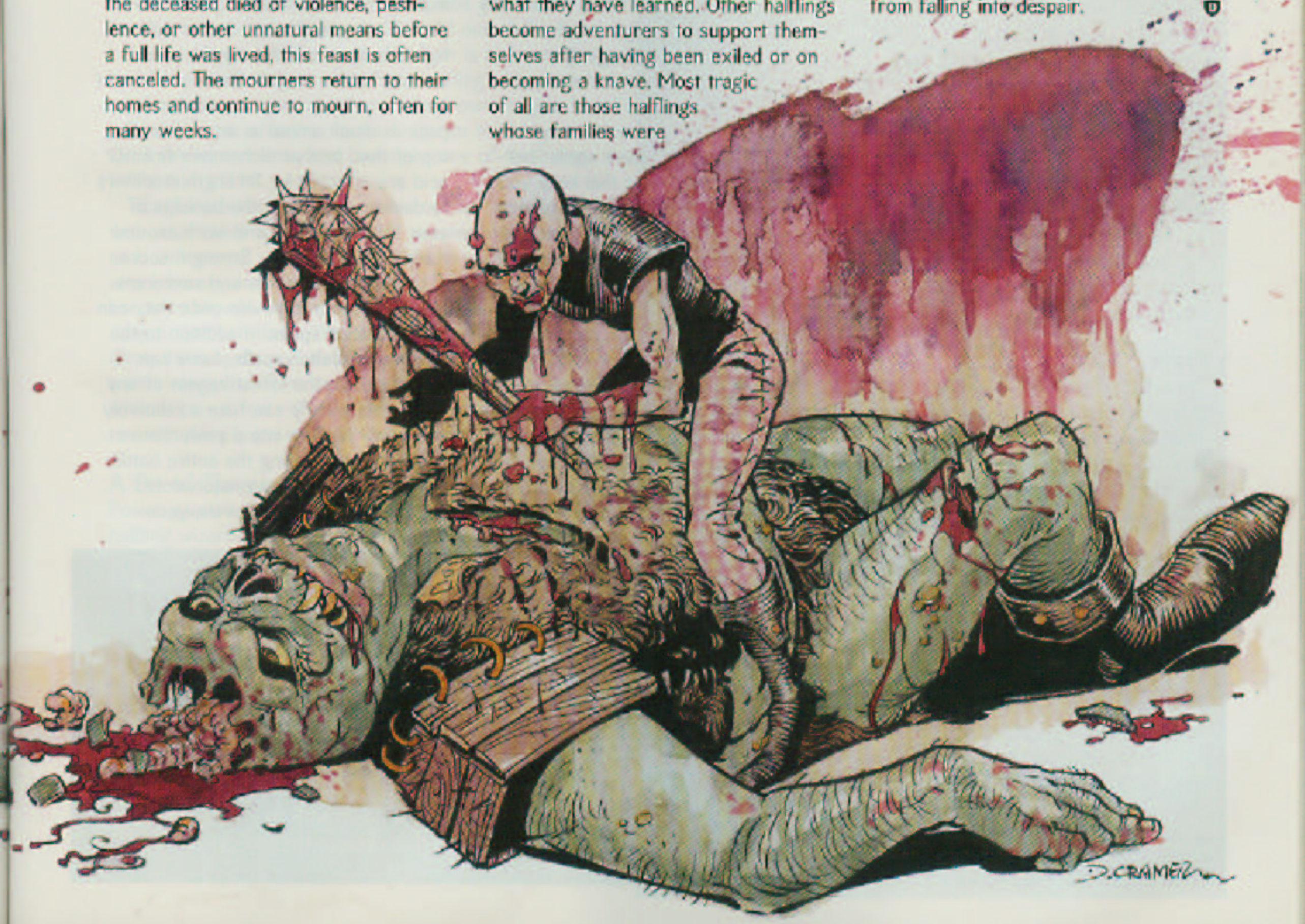
On the deceased's next birthday, the family and friends of the deceased hold a Final Birthday celebration (see Festivals, above). Once this event comes and goes, the mourners are expected to come to grips with their loss. Those halflings who continue to mourn after this point quickly begin to annoy the others, and if the mourning continues might even find themselves the target of mean-spirited practical jokes. This apparent cruelty arises not from an actual desire to torment the mourner as much as it does from annoyance. After all, as long as the mourning continues, the other halflings in the community cannot forget their loss.

HALFLING ADVENTURERS

Despite their domestic and relaxing lives, many halflings become adventurers. Most halfling adventurers are simply those who have just started a worldwalk; upon retiring from adventuring life they return to tell their kin what they have learned. Other halflings become adventurers to support themselves after having been exiled or on becoming a knave. Most tragic of all are those halflings whose families were killed by war, disease, or violence. These halflings are known as the "lost," and in cases where they are not adopted by neighboring families, they always seem to turn to adventuring as a way to come to grips with their tragic past.

Although halfling adventurers can be of any class, most are rogues or have at least some training as rogues. Their small size, natural grace, keen hearing, and natural skills with thrown weapons, climbing, jumping, and sneaking make them naturals. A halfling in a big city will often find that the jobs he is offered can be completed best with a rogue's skills. Also, the halfling's knack for avoiding mishaps often plays a huge part in completing a mission successfully. It can almost be said that halflings were born to be rogues.

All in all, halfling adventurers usually become a well-loved and valued addition to any adventuring party; their cheerfulness is quite infectious and often the only thing that keeps a wounded party from falling into despair.



Everyone knows that halflings make good rogues, but perhaps because of the influence of earlier editions, few think "tremendous cosmic power" when dreaming up character ideas for D&D's littlest PC race. It's often easy to get the jump on people as a halfling wizard, and not just because you'll be high in the initiative order most of the time.

LITTLE WIZARDS

YOU CAN CALL HIM "MINI MAGE"

by Jesse Decker

Although they make great rogues, the halfling racial bonuses to Dexterity and saving throws, along with their size modifier to Armor Class, help compensate for a wizard's typical lack of hit points. This high AC is doubly important because, although they're as hardy as humans, halflings move slow, putting them at risk during running battles or when facing many foes. Your opponents, thinking you're a rogue, will be worrying about you moving into flanking position and be reluctant to engage if you're standing next to other party members. Often, they'll stay out of reach just long enough for you to attack with a powerful spell.

If you decide to play a halfling wizard, here are a few things to keep in mind.

Stayin' Alive

The toughest job you'll have as a Small character is staying alive, especially when burdened with a wizard's Hit Dice. To survive combats that challenge characters with twice as many hit points, you'll need to do more than just stay out of reach. As a halfling, you'll start with two extra points of AC when compared to a human wizard with the same base characteristics. Playing to this strength is the easiest way for a halfling to keep out of harm's way. Don't rely only on a high Dexterity and a size bonus to Armor Class. Start with the first-level spell *mage armor*, and pile on the protective magic from there. An *amulet of natural armor* should be high on your list of magic items to acquire, as should a *ring of protection*. Use defensive spells liberally, and choose tactics that keep you out of combat. Beyond the long list of spells that increase your AC, think of long-lasting protective spells like *protection from arrows*, *resist elements*, and *stoneskin*.

Dishin' It Out

Levels 1–4: Combat at these low levels is pretty straightforward. No spellcasters at this level have enough spells to cast a spell every round of combat, but as a halfling, you've got an effective attack option for rounds when you don't cast spells. The halfling high Dexterity and the Alchemy skill can be a fearsome combination. Make alchemist's fire and acid ahead of time and throw them on the rounds you don't cast spells. With the Dexterity bonus halflings enjoy, your chance of making the ranged touch attack will probably be as good or better than a fighter's chance of hitting the same monster with a sword. Since you've got spells to rely on too, you won't need to pack as much ammo as an archer. On top of that, neither alchemist's fire nor acid are affected by Strength modifiers to damage—you'll get the benefits of your high Dexterity and work around the penalties of a low Strength score.

Levels 5–9: Wizards and sorcerers take a big jump in power once they can cast 3rd-level spells. In addition to the obvious Evocation spells, *haste* can almost double the effectiveness of any character, and *fly* can turn a relatively stationary halfling into a powerhouse capable of traversing the entire battlefield with a singe move-equivalent action. Through these levels, your

POWER GAMING TRICKS

CHOOSE MINIMUM HEIGHT AND WEIGHT FOR YOUR CHARACTER. You'll be able to reduce yourself to Tiny size at lower levels, and you'll be easier for someone else to carry if the party needs to run away at a speed higher than 20.

MAXIMIZE YOUR ARMOR CLASS. Start with a high Dexterity, cast *mage armor*, get a *ring of protection* and an *amulet of natural armor* as soon as possible, use *shield* (preferably from a wand), and use a buckler (you can always drop it as a free action to cast those crucial spells).

FAR SHOT IS A THROWN WEAPON'S BEST FRIEND. Make maximum use of the halfling's +1 to hit with thrown weapons by getting rid of those pesky range increment modifiers. As a wizard, you don't want to be that close to the bad guys.

attack bonuses start to really suffer compared with those of other characters, even a high Dexterity isn't enough to keep up. While spells like *greater magic weapon* and *true strike* offer decent alternatives to flashy offensive spells, you're probably best served by crafting or acquiring a few offensive wands for those tough fights when you're low on spells.

Level 10+: The secret to high-level spellcasters is simple: Don't hold back. Combats last a little longer at these levels because hit point totals tend to increase faster than the ability to deal damage; however the number of spells available to most spellcasters increases faster yet. Once you've reached higher levels, it's a simple enough matter to burn through your spells then *teleport* home to rest once the battle is over. There's nothing wrong with staying invisible and letting summoned creatures do your fighting for you. In tough battles, the temptation to cast a spell every turn might overshadow this conservative strategy, but it's a great way to remain active through less challenging encounters.

Feat Selection

Choosing feats is one of the coolest parts of the new D&D game. Considering the ease and power of pushing a halfling wizard's Armor Class ever higher, Dodge is a good choice at first level. Improved Initiative is also a strong choice—if you're small and get caught flat-footed, you could be grappled and out of the fight before you get to roll a single die. Run is interesting because it can mitigate one of the halfling's biggest weakness: a 20-foot movement rate. However, it's probably more effective in the long run to hold out for Craft Wondrous Item, and just make one of the many items that will let you fly.

Ranged attacks are also a viable option to pursue with your Small spellcaster. With *greater magic weapon* and *cat's grace*, you can make up for a wizard's low attack bonus, and the halfling's high Dexterity and +1 bonus to hit with thrown weapons help quite a bit. In conjunction with feats like Point Blank Shot and Precise Shot, these spells and abilities make you just as effective with a ranged weapon as a fighter of your level. But without bonus feats from your class or race, you'll have to make this choice early for it to be effective.

A Bit of Flavor

Power gamers might rejoice at the combat advantages halfling wizards enjoy over their larger counterparts, but its just as important to pack the little guys full of personality too. Did your character's Tolkienesque desire for a comfortable life lead him to arcane spells, making choices like *Leomund's secure shelter* a natural? Or was your character, although nimble compared to members of other races, not quite quick enough to compete with halflings of a more roguish bent? Answering these questions about your wizard's background is only the first step to creating his personality. How does your character feel about adventuring with larger companions? Are they good insurance against a menacing ogre, or are they merely waiting for a permanent *reduce* spell?

TOP 10 SPELLS FOR LITTLE WIZARDS

EXPEDITIOUS RETREAT **(1st level):**
Before you can cast *fly*, you'll want a way to counteract your speed disadvantage.

MAGE ARMOR/SHIELD **(1st level):**
You're little, so don't get hit. One of the keys to surviving as a little person in a dangerous world is never to let them hit you. Pile up armor bonuses, cover, size, Dexterity, and—if you can get them—natural armor bonuses to your armor class.

REDUCE **(1st level):**
Its duration is limited, but being Tiny isn't all bad. You get an extra point of Armor Class. Plus, you're really small, so you can probably go places that many larger creatures simply can't.

CAT'S GRACE **(2nd level):**
Take more advantage of your existing Dexterity.

INVISIBILITY **(2nd level):**
If there's a halfling wizard credo, it's "Don't ever make a grapple check." Being invisible doesn't necessarily make you immune to being grappled, but it lessens the chance that foes can attack you. The duration is good, so if you stay back and summon creatures while invisible, the *invisibility* spell might last for more than one battle.

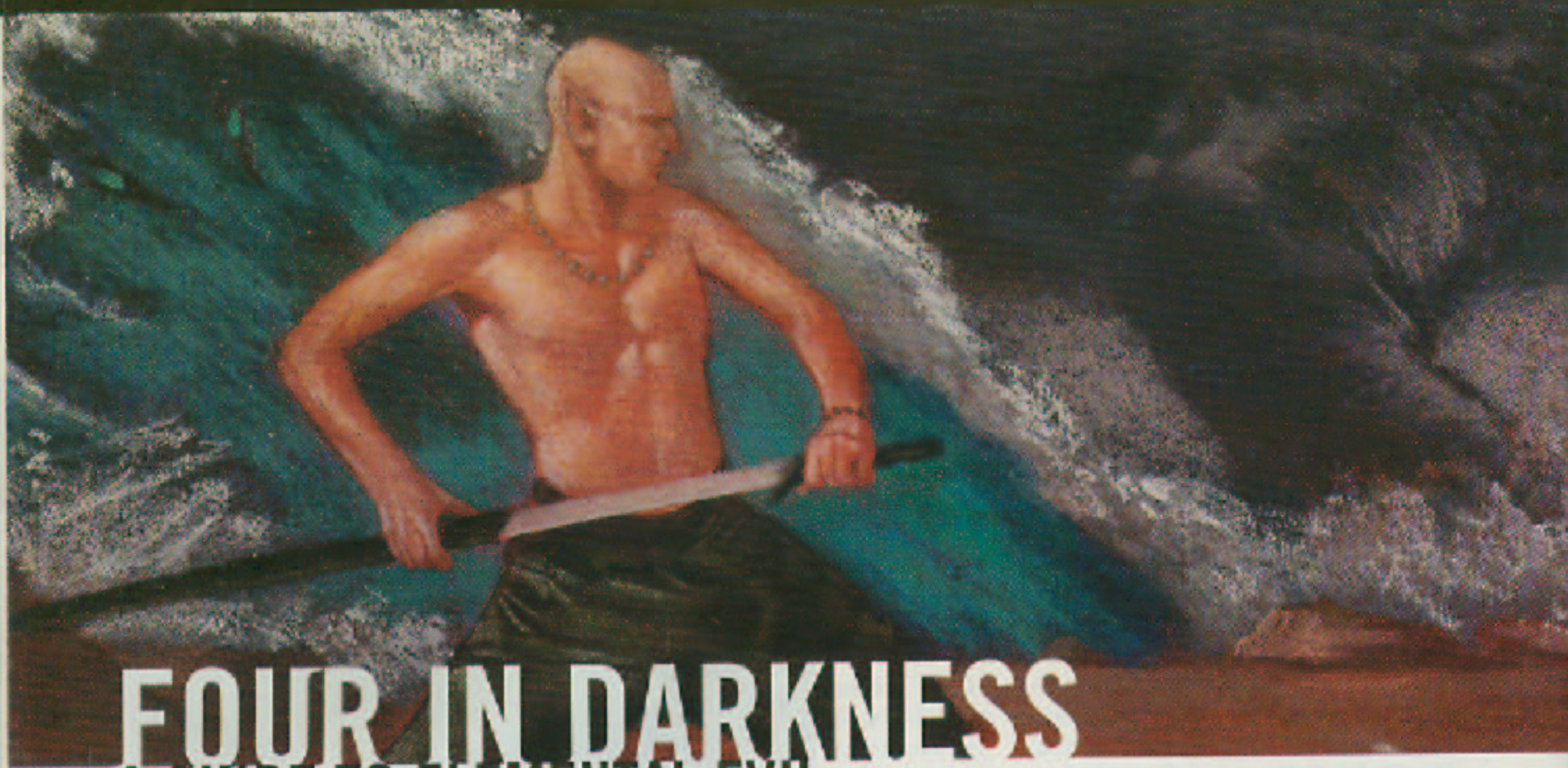
FLY **(3rd level):**
There's no better spell for mid-level halfling mages. One 3rd-level spell transforms your speed from a pitiful 20 to a blazing 90.

HASTE **(3rd Level):**
Haste can provide a tremendous combat advantage. The bonus to Armor Class can boost your halfling's already good Armor Class high enough to keep most from hitting. Plus, the extra partial action can let you keep up with the rest of the party during a protracted fight—don't forget about the partial run action.

REPULSION **(6th level):**
You don't want monsters with multiple attacks anywhere near you—nor any big creature that might grapple you. Use *repulsion* to keep them at bay. Since it requires a Will saving throw, you'll usually succeed against the big brutes.

RAY SPELLS (various):
With their naturally high Dexterity scores, halflings are better than most at making ranged touch attacks. Take a look at Steve Schubert's "Rays of Light" in *Dragon* Annual #5 for more ray spells.

SUMMON MONSTER **(various):**
You might be 3 foot 6 inches tall, but your summoned allies are as big as anyone's. Summon earth elementals and think "cover bonus to AC."



FOUR IN DARKNESS

A GUIDE TO ELEMENTAL EVIL

by Monte Cook • illustrated by Mike Dutton

Evil has many forms and many names. Elemental Evil is just one such type of insidious corruption that spawned long ago in the festering mind of some diabolic fiend. It is a rotten spot at the very core of reality—those elements that compose the world turned toward death, destruction, and betrayal. Bold warriors against darkness should take note: Despite what you have heard and hoped—Elemental Evil is not dead.

In the Service of Elemental Evil

Elemental Evil is dedicated to one concept, yet its followers approach this concept in four distinct ways. It looks into the heart of evil itself, and at the very heart of the world. The followers of Elemental Evil divide themselves into four Temples, one for each of the elements. These Temples are separate organizations, but they are ultimately unified by a dark leadership that operates from the shadows.

When one thinks of Elemental Evil, visions of evil beings made of the elements spring to mind. But that is only the beginning. The vile servants of Elemental Evil include clerics that draw upon the elements for power (or potentially, the Elemental Princes of Evil, see below). Such clerics typically enjoy not only the company of elementals but also scores of other monsters. Do not be surprised to find kuo-toa, dire sharks, or scrags in a Water Temple; basilisks or troglodytes amid the Earth Temple; invisible stalkers and powerful avians working for the clerics of Air; and pyrohydras and salamanders in the Fire Temple. Refer to the *Monster Manual* "Monsters by Type (and Subtype)" on page 4 to get ideas.

Just as often, the clerics of Elemental Evil employ evil humanoids and mercenaries to guard their temples, many of whom are converted followers of Elemental Evil, but some of whom are just there for the gold. Hobgoblins, gnolls, and ogres are commonly found serving Elemental Evil clerics.

Fighting Against Elemental Evil

If you take it upon yourself to struggle against the forces of Elemental Evil, keep the following in mind:

• First—this is obvious but it still bears mentioning—when it comes to fighting elemental forces, never use an element against itself. This is one case where you don't use fire to fight fire.

• Divide and conquer. With four competing factions (one for each element), only the strongest servants survive. This competition makes for stronger forces, but it breeds hatred and rivalry that you can use to your advantage. When you battle the forces of the Earth Temple, disguise yourselves as members of the Fire Temple. That way, reports get back after your incursion that the Fire Temple is attacking the Earth Temple. Not only does the Earth Temple not come looking for you, but they retaliate against the Fire Temple. If you need to get into the Water Temple, go to the Air Temple first and convince them to attack the Water Temple with you. You can tell the Air priests that it's in their best interest. Better yet, trick the forces of the Air Temple into attacking the Water Temple as a diversion and to weaken them for you, and then come in later on your own.

If you are captured, always feed the paranoia bred by competing elemental factions. Fan the flames of dissension among your enemies. Let evil destroy itself. If the Earth Temple eradicates the

Air Temple, that leaves one less group of foes for you to deal with. Even if the Earth Temple's power and influence increases because of their victory, the resources that they expended almost certainly compensate from your perspective. Divide and conquer.

Don't forget that there is usually some singular dark force behind it all. These evil masters often take steps to make sure that their elementally aligned forces don't completely wipe each other out. Don't get overconfident in your ability to breed feuds. Eventually, the organizing force behind the factions will visit well-orchestrated, monolithic vengeance upon you. Be ready.

There are Elements, and then There are Elements

Of course Elemental Evil is based around earth, air, fire and water. But as any mage can tell you, the "elements" most important to magic are fire, lightning, acid, sonics, and cold. Expect the elements to match up like this:

FIRE	FIRE
EARTH	ACID
AIR	LIGHTNING
WATER	COLD

The Elemental Princes of Evil

Forces stir within the Elemental Planes that threaten our perceptions of elementals. Even though they are thought to be relatively mindless creatures with little consideration of morals or ethics, small but growing numbers of them side with either good or evil. It would appear, at least for the moment, that the majority who "choose sides" have chosen the side of darkness, for they serve beings known as the Elemental Princes of Evil. These beings, also sometimes known as archomentals, possess vast power and huge armies of like-minded and similarly affiliated creatures. The Elemental Princes of Evil often work at cross purposes, their selfish natures keeping them from combining their might most of the time—and the forces of good are thankful, to say the least. Once again, the disparate nature of the elements favors the enemies of Elemental Evil.

Olhydra is the elemental princess of evil water creatures. She is a huge mass of churning water, and she dwells within a palace deep within some dark recess of her plane. She commands evil water elementals, sahuagin, water grues, water mephits, tojanidas, dire sharks, scrags, sea hags, krakens, and more.

Imix is the elemental prince of evil fire creatures. A towering column of flame with a huge sword, Imix rules over a mass of enslaved evil fire elementals, salamanders, fire grues, fire mephits, red dragons, fire giants, magmins, efreet, and other such creatures.

Yan-C-Bin, the elemental prince of evil creatures of the air, is a whirlwind of destructive power. Although he dwells alone, he commands a huge number of evil air elementals, invisible stalkers, arrowhawks, air grues, air mephits, griffons, rocs, and worse. It's said that even some vrocks and other demons serve in his army.

Ogremoch is the elemental prince of evil earth creatures. He is a nearly featureless humanoid of rock and clay with incredible strength. The ranks of his armies swell with evil earth elementals, xorns, earth grues, earth mephits, thoqquas, gargoyles, stone giants, trolls, and all manner of subterranean creatures.

Some wonder, however, if there isn't some dark god behind the Princes. It would explain the tenacity and organization of these otherwise chaotic and evil forces.

(It is also said that there are benevolently aligned counterparts to the Princes in the Elemental Planes as well, but that is a topic for another day.)

Elemental Nodes

It is rumored that in the past, when the forces of Elemental Evil were extremely strong, they created four partial planes, one for each element. These planes took the form of moon-like spheres on the edge of each elemental plane. These elemental nodes, as they were called, were meant to be staging grounds to bring powerful elemental armies from their home planes into the Material Plane, and to create a permanent conduit between the Temple of Elemental Evil and the home planes they relied upon.

EVIL ELEMENTALS	
The chance for a summoned or called elemental or elemental being to be evil depends on its location, as follows:	
Normal	0%
Abandoned Elemental Evil Temple	10%
Active Elemental Evil Compound or area related to a Temple of Elemental Evil	20%
Active Elemental Evil Temple	50%
Centralized Headquarters of Elemental Evil	70%
The Temple of Elemental Evil	90%
Elemental Node	100%

The nodes had an environment like the plane on which they bordered, but conditions were somewhat less hostile, making it difficult but not impossible for people of the Material Plane to survive there.

It is likely that the Princes of Elemental Evil played some part in the creation of the nodes. It is also likely that the forces of Elemental Evil used some sort of powerful artifact to help create and maintain them. Whether this artifact still exists remains to be seen. The means of egress into the nodes is said to be sealed, but it is quite possible that they still exist. Although they are most likely full of danger, they might be valuable sources of magical treasure, were they ever found and explored.

Evil Elementals

Many of the elementals and elemental creatures that work with the forces of Elemental Evil are truly evil themselves, despite their "always neutral" alignment listing in the *Monster Manual*. A small, isolated number of the inhabitants of the Elemental Planes are indeed evil and subjects of the Elemental Princes of Evil. Evil elementals are just like normal versions of their type except for their alignment and subservience to the Princes (and possibly some even greater evil force).

If an elemental or elemental being (any creature with the Elemental type) is summoned or called by a cleric of Elemental Evil, that creature is always evil. If such a being is summoned or called by anyone else in areas controlled by the cult, there is a chance that it is an evil creature. While this is not significant in the case of summoning (because the spell does not allow for the summoned creature to act independently), it makes calling elemental creatures dangerous. Evil elementals called by spells such as *planar ally* never work against the forces of the Elemental Evil, and they might even attempt to trick the caster and lure her into a trap or work with her enemies in some way.

Even if a non-evil elemental or elemental creature is summoned or brought into these areas, there is a chance (equal to one-half the chances listed in the "Evil Elementals" sidebar) that the being will immediately convert to evil.

New Elemental Evil Domain Spells

DM Note: The clerics in *The Return to the Temple of Elemental Evil* do not have these spells designated as prepared. If you are the DM for this adventure, feel free to swap out these spells for prepared domain spells.

ROT EARTH

Necromancy [Evil]
Level: Earth 2
Components: V, S
Casting Time: 1 action
Range: Medium (100 ft. + 10 ft./level)
Area: 10-ft. radius of earth
Duration: 1 minute/level (D)
Saving Throw: None
Spell Resistance: No
All earth and stone within the radius takes on a particularly vile quality, so that anything standing upon or touching the ground feels pain. Touching earth and stone with bare flesh inflicts 1d6 points of negative energy damage per round. Boots and similar gear are enough to protect subjects touching the ground. Likewise, hurled rocks, landslides, and the like inflict +1d6 points of negative energy damage to those in the area. Undead are not affected by this spell.

BEFOUL WATER

Necromancy [Evil]
Level: Water 2
Components: V, S
Casting Time: 1 action
Range: Medium (100 ft. + 10 ft./level)
Area: 10-ft. radius of water
Duration: 1 minute/level (D)
Saving Throw: None
Spell Resistance: No
All water within the radius takes on a particularly vile quality, so that any movement of that water inflicts damage upon living creatures it touches. Any significant movement of water (attacks by water elementals, a *control water* spell, a splash of more than a gallon of water, or a natural current of more than 5 mph) within the radius inflicts 1d6 points of negative energy damage per round. Undead are not affected by this spell.

TORTURE AIR

Necromancy [Evil]
Level: Air 2
Components: V, S
Casting Time: 1 action
Range: Medium (100 ft. + 10 ft./level)
Area: 10-ft. radius of air
Duration: 1 minute/level (D)
Saving Throw: None
Spell Resistance: No
All air within the radius takes on a particularly vile quality, so that movement of that air inflicts damage upon living creatures it touches. Any significant movement of air (attacks by air elementals, a *gust of wind* spell, or a natural wind of more than 20 mph) within the radius inflicts 1d6 points of negative energy damage per round. Undead are not affected by this spell.

BLIGHT FIRE

Necromancy [Evil]
Level: Fire 2
Components: V, S
Casting Time: 1 action
Range: Medium (100 ft. + 10 ft./level)
Area: 20-ft. radius of fire
Duration: 1 minute/level (D)
Saving Throw: None
Spell Resistance: No
All fire within the radius takes on a particularly vile quality, inflicting additional damage upon living creatures that it touches. Any damage inflicted by fire (whether normal, magical, or the essence of an elemental) within the radius is increased by +1d6 points of negative energy damage per round. This additional damage is not fire damage. Undead are not affected by this spell.

INFUSE WITH ELEMENT
Transmutation [Evil]
Level: Earth 4, Air 4, Fire 4, Water 4
Components: V, S, M
Casting Time: 1 action
Range: Medium (100 ft. + 10 ft./level)
Target: Living creature touched
Duration: 10 minutes/level (D)
Saving Throw: Fortitude negates (Harmless)
Spell Resistance: Yes
You infuse elemental power into a target creature, making it more powerful. The powers gained by the infusion depend on the type of element used.

If cast as a fire spell, the target gains a +2 enhancement bonus to Dexterity, +10 enhancement bonus to Speed, and fire resistance 20.

If cast as an air spell, the target can fly (as the *fly* spell) and lightning resistance 20.

If cast as a water spell, the target can breathe water, gains a +2 enhancement bonus to Constitution, and cold resistance 20.

If cast as an earth spell, the target gains a +2 enhancement bonus to Strength, damage reduction of 10/+1, and acid resistance 20.

If a creature is infused with the power of more than one element at a time, the elements cancel themselves out, no abilities are gained, and all *infuse with element* spells concerned end.

New Elemental Arcane Spells

DM Note: The wizards and sorcerers in *The Return to the Temple of Elemental Evil* do not have these spells designated as prepared. If you are running this adventure, feel free to swap out these spells for spells they have prepared or add them to their spellbooks. These spells can be found on the spell-objects of grues (see below).

WATER BURST
Evocation
Level: Sor/Wiz 1
Components: V, S
Casting Time: 1 action
Range: Close (25 ft. + 5 ft./2 levels)
Effect: Stream of water
Duration: Instantaneous
Saving Throw: None
Spell Resistance: Yes
A high-pressure stream of water shoots from your hand at one target. You must succeed at a ranged touch attack to hit your target. The water inflicts 1d6 points of damage per level of the caster (maximum 5d6). This spell can also be used to extinguish one flame of Small size or smaller (such as a campfire).

STONE MISSILES
Evocation
Level: Sor/Wiz 1
Components: V, S
Casting Time: 1 action
Range: Medium (100 ft. + 10 ft./level)
Effect: Missiles of rock
Duration: Instantaneous
Saving Throw: None
Spell Resistance: Yes
A number of small stones fly toward 1d4 targets. You must succeed at a ranged touch attack to hit each target. A single creature cannot be made a target more than once per casting. The stones inflict 1d4 points of damage per level of the caster (maximum 5d4) per target. The stones disappear after striking their target or flying to the maximum of their range, whichever comes first.

BLAST OF AIR
Evocation
Level: Sor/Wiz 1
Components: V, S
Casting Time: 1 action
Range: Close (25 ft. + 5 ft./2 levels)
Effect: Cone of air
Duration: Instantaneous
Saving Throw: Reflex negates
Spell Resistance: Yes
A cone of air whirls away from your outstretched hand. Those failing their saves are blinded for 1 round by dirt and dust. Sightless creatures are immune to the blinding effect but can still take damage. The winds are not strong enough to extinguish flames larger than candles.

NEW MONSTERS

GRUES

Grues are the result of evil spells tainting the elemental planes. These horrible creatures are spawned in dark places within those planes, and they hide within such areas until summoned to another plane where they can work their evil. They leave their home plane whenever given the opportunity.

Grues are prized by wizards, for at the heart of these creatures lies a magic, pearl-like object the size of a fist, upon which is carefully etched the arcane

CHAGGRIN
(Earth Grue)

Earth grues, also called chaggrins or even soil beasts, are a magical corruption of earth and rock. They spend their time digging and tearing apart their element.

An earth grue looks something like a squat, humanoid mole made of clumped soil and rocks.

Earth grues speak Terran, although they rarely choose to do so. Their voices sound like rumbling, crushing stones.

The spell-object within a chaggrin is *resist elements* 50% of the time (01-50) and *stone missiles* the rest of the time (51-00).

HARGINN
(Fire Grue)

Fire grues are also called harginns or flame horrors. These humanoid beings made entirely of flame cavort about in obscene dances performed for the sake of pure evil.

Fire grues speak Ignan. Their voices sound like rustling, crackling flame.

The spell-object within a harginn is *resist elements* 50% of the time (01-50) and *burning hands* the rest of the time (51-00).

	Small Elemental (Earth)	Medium Elemental (Fire)
Hit Dice	5d8+23 (45 hp)	5d8+5 (27 hp)
Initiative	+0	+3 (Dex)
Speed	30 ft., Burrow 20 ft.	40 ft.
AC	17 (+1 size, +6 natural)	16 (+3 Dex, +3 natural)
Attacks	Claw +7 melee	Slam +3 melee
Damage	2 Claws 1d6+3	Slam 1d4 and 1d6 fire
Face/Reach	5 ft. by 5 ft. /5 ft.	5 ft. by 5 ft. /5 ft.
Special Attacks	Sneak attack +1d6	Fire spray
Special Qualities	Damage resistance 10/+1, acid immunity, spell disruption	Damage resistance 10/+1, blink, fire immunity, spell disruption
Saves	Fort +8, Ref +1, Will +1	Fort +2, Ref +7, Will +0
Abilities	Str 16, Dex 10, Con 18, Int 5, Wis 11, Cha 8	Str 10, Dex 16, Con 12, Int 10, Wis 9, Cha 8
Skills	Hide +12, Listen +8, Spot +2	Listen +7, Move Silently +11, Search +2, Spot +7
Feats	Toughness	
Climate/Terrain	Any land and underground	Any land and underground
Organization	Solitary	Solitary
Challenge Rating	4	4
Treasure	Special	Special
Alignment	Usually neutral evil	Usually neutral evil
Advancement	6-8 HD (Medium); 9-15 HD (Large)	6-8 HD (Large); 9-15 HD (Huge)

Combat

Grues have varied combat abilities and tactics, but they all have the same elemental qualities.

Elemental: Immune to poison, sleep, paralysis, and stunning. Not subject to critical hits.

Earth grues wait just beneath the surface to surprise foes.

Spell Disruption (Su): The following spells cannot be cast within 40 feet of an earth grue: *magic stone, soften earth and stone, stone shape, transmute rock to mud, transmute mud to rock, spike stones, move earth, stone to flesh, flesh to stone, wall of stone, statue,* and *earthquake,* as well as other "earth-based" spells at the DM's discretion. These spells, if active when the grue comes within 40 feet, are dispelled as if *dispel magic* was cast upon them by a 10th-level sorcerer.

Fire grues use their speed and dexterity to their advantage in combat, attempting to keep out of melee.

***Blink* (Sp):** Fire grues flicker as if they have a *blink* spell cast upon them by a 10th-level sorcerer.

***Fire Spray* (Sp):** Fire grues can create a fan of flames that projects in a 30 foot cone away from their outstretched hands, inflicting 2d6 points of damage (Reflex save for half damage—DC 10).

Spell Disruption (Su): Any spell with the fire subtype cannot be cast within 40 feet of a fire grue. These spells, if active when the grue comes within 40 feet, are dispelled as if *dispel magic* was cast upon them by a 10th-level sorcerer.

workings of an elemental spell. With careful study, a wizard can copy the spell into her spellbook. This spell-object's origins lie in the creature's own magical beginning, and it is the only thing that remains if a grue is slain. Of course, a grue that is summoned and then killed is not truly slain, so no spell-object is gained. See below for the specifics of the spell, as it depends on the type of grue.

ILDRISS
(Air Grue)

Air grues are also called ildriss or wind terrors. They delight in churning the air and tossing about objects.

Ildriss are invisible churning masses of air. If rendered visible, they look like a churning cloud of gas with a barely visible face, complete with sinister, angry features.

Air grues speak Auran, although they rarely speak. Their voices sound like the whispering wind.

The spell-object within an ildriss is *resist elements* 50% of the time (01-50) and *blast of air* the rest of the time (51-00).

Small Elemental (Air)
5d8 (22 hp)
+2 (Dex)
Fly 40 ft. (Perfect)
16 (+1 size, +2 Dex, +3
Slam +5 melee
Slam 1d6+1
5 ft. by 5 ft. /5 ft.
--
Damage resistance 15/+1, invisibility, lightning immunity, spell disruption
Fort +1, Ref +6, Will +2
Str 12, Dex 14, Con 10, Int 8, Wis 12, Cha 8
Listen +9, Move Silently +10, Spot +9
Flyby Attack
Any land and underground
Solitary
4
Special
Usually neutral evil
6-8 HD (Medium); 9-15 HD (Large)

Air grues use their speed and invisibility to their advantage in combat. They move about, attacking foes when they are unaware if possible.

Invisible (Su): Air grues are naturally invisible. Attacks against them have a 50% miss chance, assuming the attacker knows or guesses which area to attack.

Spell Disruption (Su): The following spells cannot be cast within 40 feet of an air grue: *obscuring mist, fog cloud, whispering wind, wind wall, gaseous form, gust of wind, stinking cloud, air walk, control winds,* and *control weather,* as well as other "air-based" spells at the DM's discretion. These spells, if active when the grue comes within 40 feet, are dispelled as if *dispel magic* was cast upon them by a 10th-level sorcerer.

VARDIGG
(Water Grue)

Water grues, also called vardiggs or even fluid brutes, are a sinister alteration of water. They splash about, churning their own element to make it unpleasant for any creature in the water with them.

A vardigg appears at first to be a quivering wave of briny water, but closer examination shows a scowling face within the water and foam.

Water grues speak Aquan, although they rarely choose to do so. Their voices sound like bubbling, gurgling water.

The spell-object within a vardigg is *resist elements* 50% of the time (01-50) and *water burst* the rest of the time (51-00).

Medium Elemental (Water)
5d8+10 (32 hp)
+1 (Dex)
40 ft., Swim 60 ft.
14 (+1 Dex, +3 natural)
Slam +4 melee
Slam 1d6+1
5 ft. by 5 ft. /5 ft.
Water spray
Damage resistance 15/+1, cold immunity, spell disruption
Fort +5, Ref +2, Will +0
Str 12, Dex 12, Con 13, Int 8, Wis 9, Cha 8
Hide +7, Listen +7, Spot +7
Any land and underground
Solitary
4
Special
Usually neutral evil
6-8 HD (Large); 9-15 HD (Huge)

Water grues hide within water to surprise those on or near the surface.

***Water Spray* (Sp):** Water grues can create a 30-foot jet of water (5 feet wide) that shoots away from them. Creatures caught in the path take 3d6 points of damage (Reflex save for half damage–DC 10).

Spell Disruption (Su): The following spells cannot be cast within 40 feet of a water grue: *create water, obscuring mist, fog cloud, control water, ice storm, cone of cold,* and *horrid wilting,* as well as other "water-based" spells at the DM's discretion. These spells, if active when the grue comes within 40 feet, are dispelled as if *dispel magic* was cast upon them by a 10th-level sorcerer.

DEMONICALLY FUSED ELEMENTAL TEMPLATE

Demonically fused elementals are normal elementals corrupted and tainted with demonic essence. The composite being is a new sort of creature, wholly evil with a different agenda and different powers than their normal elemental counterparts. Demonically fused elementals usually appear as darker, more sinister versions of the original elemental creature.

Creating A Demonically Fused Elemental

"Demonically fused elemental" is a template that can be added to any elemental creature. Elementals with this template keep their creature type. A demonically fused elemental uses all the base creature's statistics and special abilities except as noted here.

Special Attacks	A demonically fused elemental creature retains all the special attacks of the base creature and also gains *haste* and smite good.
***Haste* (Su)**	Because the creature is an actual composite entity, and both the demon and the elemental are—at least somewhat—separately aware, the demonically fused elemental gains an additional partial action and a +4 haste bonus to AC as if always *hasted*.
Smite Good (Su)	Once per day the creature can make a normal attack to deal additional damage equal to its HD total (maximum of +20) against a good foe. The creature must decide to use its smite power before its attack. A missed smite good attack is wasted.
Saves	Same as the base creature.
Abilities	Increase from the base creature as follows: Str +4 Dex +4 Con +2 Int +4 Wis +0 Cha +2

Skills	Same as the base creature.
Feats	Same as the base creature.
Climate/ Terrain	Any land and underground
Organization	Same as the base creature
Challenge Rating	Up to 3 HD, as base creature +1 4 HD to 7 HD, as base creature +2 8+ HD, as base creature +3
Treasure	Same as the base creature
Alignment	Always chaotic evil
Advancement	Same as the base creature

SPECIAL QUALITIES

A demonically fused creature retains all the special qualities of the base creature and also gains the following abilities:

- Darkvision with a range of 60 feet.
- Cold and fire resistance.*
- Damage reduction.*
- SR equal to double the creature's HD (maximum 25).

*RESISTANCE TABLE

Hit Dice	Cold, Fire Resistance	Damage Reduction
1-3	5	—
4-7	10	10/+1
8-11	15	15/+2
12+	20	20/+3

If the base creature already has one or more of these special qualities, use the better value.

Example:

DEMONICALLY FUSED FIRE ELEMENTAL

SMALL ELEMENTAL (Fire)

Hit Dice:	2d8+2 (11 hp)
Initiative:	+7 (+3 Dex, +4 Improved Initiative)
Speed:	50 ft.
AC:	21 (+1 size, +3 Dex, +3 natural, +4 haste)
Attacks:	Slam +5 melee
Damage:	Slam 1d4+2 and 1d4 fire
Face/Reach:	5 ft. by 5 ft./5 ft.
Special Attacks:	Burn
Special Qualities:	Elemental, fire subtype, cold resistance 5, haste, smite good. SR 4
Saves:	Fort +1, Ref +6, Will +0
Abilities:	Str 14, Dex 17, Con 12, Int 8, Wis 11, Cha 13
Skills:	Hide +7, Listen +5, Move Silently +7, Spot +5
Feats:	Improved Initiative, Weapon Finesse (slam)
Climate/Terrain:	Any land and underground
Organization:	Solitary
Challenge Rating:	2
Treasure:	None
Alignment:	Always chaotic evil
Advancement:	3 HD (Small)

COMBAT

A fire elemental is a fierce opponent that attacks its enemies directly and savagely. It takes joy in burning the creatures and objects of the Material Plane to ashes.

Burn (Ex)

Those hit by a fire elemental's slam attack must succeed at a Reflex save (DC 12) or catch fire. The flame burns for 1d4 rounds (see Catching on Fire, page 86 in the *Dungeon Master's Guide*). A burning creature can take a move-equivalent action to put out the flame.

Creatures hitting a fire elemental with natural weapons or unarmed attacks take fire damage as though hit by the elemental's attack, and also catch fire unless they succeed at a Reflex save (DC 12).

Haste (Su)

The demonically fused elemental gains an additional partial action and a +4 haste bonus to AC as if always *hasted*.

Smite Good (Su)

Once per day the demonically fused elemental can make an attack to deal +2 additional damage against a good foe. The creature must decide to use its smite power before its attack. A missed attack wastes that use of the smite good ability.

Fire Subtype (Ex)

Fire immunity, double damage from cold except on a successful save (although the creature has cold resistance 5).

DM NOTE

Although these new monsters do not appear in *The Return to the Temple of Elemental Evil*, a DM for the adventure should feel free to swap these creatures in. For example, the grues would make excellent guardians of the elemental temples in Chapter 5, and demonically fused elementals would be good replacements for the standard elementals found in Chapter 6 (particularly area 33).

The night was black and cold. Freezing rain pelted down hard and relentless. I stood beneath the scant shelter of a crumbling archway, its ancient stones dripping and slimy with green moss. Icy mist rose from the graveyard beyond the arch like ghostly spirits rising from the dead. It was easy to see how the people here believed in their supernatural terrors. Ignorance and superstition always went hand in hand.

enchantment

by ben bova

I was soaked to the skin, despite the heavy woolen cloak I had draped over my tunic and chain mail. My body automatically clamped down my peripheral blood vessels to keep as much body heat within me as possible.

It had been raining steadily for days, and now the rain was turning into sleet. Back south where Ambrosius ruled as High King in Cadbury castle it was harvest time, with bright golden days and a smiling orange full moon. Here along Hadrian's Wall it was already winter; snow was on the way. Arthur's long campaign against the barbarians was grinding to a halt.

Once the Roman legions abandoned Britain, barbarian tribes from across the sea invaded the island. Saxons, Angles, Jutes, Frisians—they swarmed onto Britain's shores and burned, looted, and raped their way inland. It was Arthur's hope to drive them back into the sea.

Arthur and his knights had fought all summer long, battling the invading barbarians in a bitter campaign that had started far to the south and now had brought us to the border of the Scottish lands. The aging Ambrosius Aurelianus, who styled himself High King of all the Celts, remained in his fine castle at Cadbury, ready to move against the Saxons on Britain's south shore if they tried to push inland.

There were too few knights for Arthur to drive the barbarians entirely out of Britain. But he crushed their military power, annihilated the flower of their fighting manhood. Thoroughly cowed, they retreated to their fortified villages along the coast, but they would push no farther inland. Not until a new generation of boys grew to fighting age.

illustrated by terese nielsen

Meantime the wild and fearsome Scots and Picts had swarmed across the unguarded length of Hadrian's Wall to spread fire and terror through the northern lands. Three days ago we had trapped their marauding army against the wall and slaughtered them. They had thought the old crumbling wall was meant to keep them out of Britain's northern reaches. Arthur showed them that the wall had other uses. It became a trap. Pinned against the wall, they could not flee when Arthur's knights rode down on them.

It was a terrible day, raining hard, the ground beneath our horses' hooves a sea of cloying, slippery mud. Sir Bors wanted to wait until the rain stopped and the field dried, but Arthur feared that the barbarians would escape across the wall by then. So we charged through the rain and mud into the wild, disorganized mass of frenzied barbarians. Soon the mud was churned into an ocean of blood.

I rode behind Arthur. I served as his squire, and my duty was to protect his back. He divided the knights into two divisions, one headed by Bors, the other by himself. We charged from opposite directions, catching the freezing, rain-soaked barbarian warriors between us. They fought bravely at first, but no man on foot can stand up to the charge of knights protected by chain mail, shield, and helmet, driving home an iron-tipped lance with all the power of a mighty steed at full gallop behind it.

The barbarians crumbled after that first charge. The battle became a melee, with enemy warriors scrambling madly up the overgrown old stones of the Wall, made slippery by the incessant rain, slicker still by their own blood.

Arthur wielded Excalibur, stroking to the right and left, slashing the life from every warrior he could reach. Lancelot was at his right hand, his own sword a blur of swift death. I stayed on Arthur's left, alert for treachery. I knew that Arthur had been marked for assassination; I myself had been ordered to kill him by Aten, the Creator who had sent me to this time and place.

The battle ended at last; Arthur was barely touched during the fighting. Night fell, and the knights huddled around fitful campfires, sheltering beneath the flat-sided tents erected by their churls. But repose was not for me.

I followed a summons implanted in my mind and headed off to the distant graveyard. Now I waited in the freezing rain beneath the dripping stones of the ancient archway. I half expected Aten or one of the other Creators to rise out of the mists in the graveyard. Instead, I saw the cloaked and hooded figure of a monk making his way around the perimeter of the cemetery, head bent and shoulders stooped against the pelting rain.

He carried a lantern that flickered against the miserable night. Once he reached me, he lifted it high enough to see my face.

"You are Orion?" he asked, in a voice thick with age and rheumy congestion.

"I am," I said. "And you?"

"I am but a humble messenger sent to fetch you. Follow me."

Coughing, he led me around the edge of the graveyard, not daring to cut through it toward his destination. Dark bare trees stood along the muddy path, stretching their empty arms to the cloud-covered sky. At last we reached a small dome made of stones. A monk's solitary cell, I realized. A place built for solitary prayer and penitence. A place, I thought, for hunger and pneumonia. Through the rain-soaked darkness I could hear waves crashing against a craggy cliff. The sea was not far off.

I had to duck low to get through the cell's entrance, and once inside I could stand straight only in the center of the cramped little dome. It was a relief to get out of the rain, although the stones of the cell's interior were slimy with mold and dripping water. The beehive-shaped cell was empty. In the dim light of the monk's lamp I could see that there was no chair, no hearth, not even a blanket to sleep upon. Nothing but a few tufts of straw thrown on the muddy ground.

"Wait here," wheezed the monk.

Before I could reply or ask a question, he stepped outside into the icy rain and disappeared in the darkness.

"Orion."

I turned to see Merlin. The old wizard stood before me in a circle of light, his dark robe reaching to the ground, his ash-gray hair neatly combed and tied back, his long beard trim and clean, rather than in its usual knotted filthy state. He had stayed behind at Cadbury castle, many weeks' travel from this place; yet he was here.

"My lord Merlin," I said, as befitted a squire addressing his master's mentor, a man reputed to be a mighty wizard.

He smiled wanly. "No need for obsequies, Orion. We can speak frankly to one another."

"As you wish," I said cautiously.

I had to duck low to get through the cell's entrance . . .

"Wait here," wheezed the monk.

He gazed at me for a long, silent moment, those piercing eyes beneath the shaggy brows inspecting me like x-ray lasers.

"You are one of Aten's creatures, obviously."

"And which of the Creators are you?" I countered.

"Why are you resisting Aten's commands?"

I was cold, wet, tired from the long day's fighting, weary of being Aten's pawn. This wizened old man, so shrivelled and frail I could snap his spine like a dry twig, was toying with me, and I resented it.

"Aten hasn't told you?" I asked. "Why don't you look into my mind and find out for yourself?"

He shook his head. "Aten has built blocks into your mind. Limitations. Do you recall when you first met Arthur?"

"At Amesbury fort, last spring," I said.

Again he shook his head. "No. Years before that. Arthur was merely a lad then."

I tried to remember. I could feel my face wrinkling into a frown of concentration. Nothing.

"Do you remember Grendel and the cave where you found Excalibur?"

"Anya," I said, as the memory of her matchless beauty surfaced in my consciousness. "She is the Lady of the Lake; she gave Excalibur to Arthur."

"But you remember nothing of Grendel and Heorot?"

"Nothing," I admitted.

"You see? Aten has blocked your mind. He allows you to know only enough to accomplish your mission."

"Who are you?" I asked.

"One of the Creators, as you guessed."

"Which one?"

He tugged at his beard for a moment, then smiled in a scornful, mocking way. "Do you really want to know, Orion?"

"Yes," I answered.

"Very well."

The light bathing him intensified, brightened until it was almost too dazzling to look at. It turned red, slowly at first, but then its color deepened, redder than fire, redder than hot molten rubies fresh from the Earth's fiery core. I felt its heat radiating against me, burning me, forcing me to squeeze my eyes shut.

"Don't be afraid, Orion. You may look upon me now."

We were no longer in the monk's cold, dank cell. We stood in a long columned hall, thick stone pillars so tall their tops were lost in shadow. Torches burned in sconces between the pillars, throwing baleful ruby light across the hard polished stone floor. Before me stood a man in the full splendor of youthful adulthood, magnificently garbed in a sculpted uniform of gleaming jet-black armor inlaid with intricate traceries of blood red. His hair and beard were dark, his eyes even darker, blazing like chips of onyx in the flickering light of the torches.

"You may call me Hades," he said.

Hades. The Creators took pleasure in appearing to mere mortals as gods and goddesses. The Creator who commanded me styled himself Aten, an ancient sun god. To the classical Greeks he was Apollo, to the Incas he was Inti, to the Persians of Zoroaster's time he called himself Ormazd, the god of light.

This one was Hades. In Greek mythology Hades was the brother of Zeus, lord of the underworld. Death was his domain.

"Where is Anya?" I asked.

Of all the Creators, she was the only one who cared about humankind. All the others played their games and manipulated history to suit their lusts for power and adulation. How many wars through the long millennia had been started by their petty jealousies and rivalries? How many millions of humans had been sacrificed to their obsessions and hates? Anya alone tried to help mere mortals. I loved her; through all the missions of murder and violence that I had endured, through all the deaths that I had suffered, Anya's love was the one joy that I knew, the only reason that I kept struggling. I wanted to find her, reach her, be with her for eternity.

But Aten kept us apart. He had created me, built me to be his hunter, his warrior, his assassin. It was Aten who sent me to die in the eternal snows of the Ice Age and a thousand other placetimes. It was Anya who helped me, loved me, cared for me.

"Anya is far from here," said Hades, his face grown serious. "Aten knows that she opposes his desires concerning Arthur and he has stirred a disruption of the worldlines that she is striving to repair."

"She saved my life when Morganna was ready to kill me," I remembered.

"She won't be able to help you when next you meet the bewitching Morganna."

Morganna was in truth another of the Creators, the one who called herself Aphrodite: beautiful, capricious, cruel.

"Morganna seeks Arthur's destruction," I said.

Hades nodded solemnly. "She supports Aten in this. Anya and a few of the other Creators oppose them."

"And you?"

Hades smiled again, a coldly calculating smile. "I haven't decided which way I will go. As Merlin, I have helped young Arthur. He could become a powerful force in human history. He just might be able to make Britain into a peaceful, prosperous island, a haven of civilization in a world darkened by the collapse of Rome. But I doubt that he ever will. His time may already be past."

"Aten wants Arthur out of the way so that the barbarians can engulf Britain," I said. "He wants to see a barbarian empire covering all of the Old World, from Hibernia to the islands of Japan, all of them worshipping him."

"There is much to be said for such a plan," Hades said slowly. "It will bring about a millennium or so of disruption, but—"

"A thousand years of ignorance and war, of disease and death," I said.

"What's a thousand years?" he quipped, shrugging.

"What's a few tens of millions of lives?" I retorted sarcastically.

"Orion, you bleed too much for these mortals."

"I will not let Aten murder Arthur."

His dark brows rose. "Bold talk for a creature. If Aten wills it, you will do whatever he wants."

"No," I insisted. "I'm not a robot or a puppet."

"He'll let you die, then. Very painfully. And you will not be revived."

If I can't be with Anya, I thought to myself, *I might as well die forever.*

"And he'll send another creature to carry out his commands. You'll suffer great pain and final oblivion—for nothing."

"I will not assassinate Arthur," I repeated stubbornly. "As long as I live, I will protect him."

Hades stroked his beard thoughtfully, staring at me for a long, silent moment. "It will be interesting to see how long you can carry out your resolve. Aten will destroy you sooner or later, of course, but I wonder just how long you can get away with defying him."

"You find this amusing?"

"Very," he admitted casually. "You know, I came to this placetime and took on the guise of Merlin to help Arthur through his childhood. Aten wanted Arthur to succeed only far enough to force the barbarians to combine against him."

"I understand that. Then Arthur is to be killed."

"Thanks to you, Arthur is trouncing the barbarians, shattering their power. Aten wants him stopped. So does Morganna."

"He doesn't deserve to be murdered."

"Perhaps, perhaps not," Hades mused. "Aten has been after me to join his side in this. But you . . . you and your ridiculous insistence on defying him . . . I wonder how far you can carry it out?"

"Help me, then," I blurted. "With your help Arthur can make Britain a beacon of civilization."

He laughed. "Aten would be furious."

"What of it? Is he more powerful than you?"

His laughter cut off. "I'll go this far, Orion. I will not help Aten. Neither will I join the other side. I will watch how far you can go. It will be an amusing game."

That's all that mortal misery and death meant to these

Creators. We were a game to amuse them.

Then I recalled what he had said earlier. "Arthur will meet Morganna again?"

"Yes, and soon. You are on the edge of her domain now."

"Berenicia."

"Already she is laying her plans for him."

"What plans?" I asked eagerly.

Instead of answering, Hades disappeared. The torch-lit columned hall vanished. I was back in the cold, dripping monk's cell again. Alone.

"I DREAMED OF MERLIN last night," Arthur told me when I met him the following morning.

I suppressed a smile and replied, "So did I, my lord."

The rain had stopped at last. The clouds had cleared away. A pale northern sun shone out of a crisp blue sky. It wasn't warm, but compared to the miserable weather of the past few days, it seemed like midsummer to us.

The long summer's fighting had toughened Arthur, matured him. To the casual eye he was still a very young man in his early twenties, broad of shoulder and strongly muscled. His sandy light brown hair fell to his shoulders; his beard was neatly trimmed. His light blue eyes were clear and sparkling with energy.

We were breaking camp that morning. Arthur had decided to take his knights across Hadrian's Wall into the land of the Scots, not so much to fight the tattered remains of their army as to show them that they had no refuge from his power. Ambrosius's power, actually. Ambrosius was the High King, Arthur's aging uncle, and Arthur fought beneath his banner. Arthur was the old king's *dux bellorum,* battle leader.

"It was a troubling dream," he said as we walked slowly toward the makeshift corral where our horses awaited. Unfortunately, the wind was in our faces.

If the smell and the flies bothered Arthur, however, he gave no sign of it. He talked about his dream.

"It was very strange, Orion. Merlin appeared to me with a very lovely young girl at his side. An enchantress, it seemed to me."

"Morganna?" I asked.

He shook his head. "No, not her, thank God." He crossed himself.

"Then who was she?"

"I don't know. But she certainly seemed to have Merlin in her spell. He told me he was going away with her and I wouldn't see him anymore."

I could see that Arthur was clearly perplexed.

"You don't think that Merlin would leave me, do you? He's been like a father to me. I can't remember a time when he wasn't there, helping me, showing me what I should do."

"Perhaps," I said, "you are old enough now to make your own decisions. Perhaps you no longer need Merlin."

He looked alarmed at that thought. "I've sent a messenger to Cadbury castle. I want to make certain that Merlin is still there. That he's all right. Perhaps this dream was a warning that he's sick. He's very old, you know."

Older than you can understand, I replied silently.

We rode that day through one of the gates in the wall built by the Romans nearly four centuries earlier. Even though Arthur's knights numbered scarcely two hundred, it took all day for them and their squires and the footmen and churls and camp followers to get through that single unguarded gate.

On the far side of the Wall the land stretched out before us in rolling hills that led to misty blue mountains in the distance. We rode slowly along a broad grassy dale, with the footmen trudging behind us. Thick forest climbed up the hillsides on either side of us.

Sir Bors rode up to Arthur's side, a rare smile on his doughty, battle scarred face.

"North of the Wall," he said proudly. "No civilized troops have been on this side of the Wall since the legions left."

"Detail some of the knights to ride ahead and along our flanks.

Those woods could hide an army of ambushers easily."

Arthur smiled back at him, but said, "Detail some of the knights to ride ahead and along our flanks. Those woods could hide an army of ambushers easily."

Bors nodded. Thick forests were poor territory for mounted knights. We dealt best with our enemies in open ground, where we could charge them.

Young Lancelot, who always rode within earshot of Arthur, eagerly volunteered for the picket duty. Bors distrusted Lancelot's ardent quest for glory; he thought the young knight's fearless courage was little short of foolhardy. But on this day even tough old Bors nodded laughingly and sent Lancelot on his way.

It must be the good weather, I thought.

Then Bors turned back to Arthur. "We'll be in the enchantress's domain soon."

Arthur nodded and muttered, "Morganna."

He had been truly enchanted by Morganna back at Cadbury castle a year ago. Aphrodite had besotted him and then tried to assassinate him. Only Anya's interference had saved Arthur's life.

"My uncle Ambrosius wants an alliance with Berenicia. It could be an effective buffer against the Scots and Picts."

"An alliance with the witch?" Bors grumbled.

Arthur smiled at the older knight, but it was cheerless, bitter. "The High King wants it."

That ended Bors's smiles for the rest of the day.

THE NEXT MORNING we reached castle Berenicia. It was an impressive citadel, standing high on a crag by the relentless sea, three of its sides protected by the sheer cliff. The only way to approach it was by the winding uphill path we rode. Unlike most of the fortresses I had seen, which were little more that grimy stockades with wooden palisades around them, Berenicia was protected by stone walls with turrets at each corner. A steep ditch ran in front of the main gate. Its drawbridge was pulled up.

Sir Gawain, freshly washed and his long dark locks shining with oil, whistled with appreciation as he looked over the battlements.

"No wonder the barbarians have never been able to take this castle," he said.

"What are you so prettied up for?" Bors jibed at him.

Gawain flashed his bright smile. "Where there's a castle, there are wenches." He turned to Arthur. "You may have the princess, my lord, but you can't have *all* the women."

We stopped before the ditch and leather-lunged Bors hailed the castle.

"Who goes there?" came the time-honored challenge from the battlements above the main gate.

"Sir Arthur, dux bellorum of Ambrosius Aurelianus, High King of all the Celts, has come to see the Princess Morganna."

Morganna's father had died some years ago, we knew, and she ruled Berenicia. By witchcraft, according to the fearful tales told of her. By the powers of the Creators, I knew. It amounted to almost the same thing.

"*Queen* Morganna will decide whether she wishes to receive you," the sentinel responded.

"She styles herself a queen now," Bors said to Arthur.

"Perhaps she's married," Gawain suggested.

Arthur looked relieved at that thought. Then he wondered, "If she has married, it must be to a king. Who could it be?"

"Who would have her?" Bors muttered.

At length, the drawbridge rattled down and we rode over it into the courtyard, our horses' hooves booming on the stout timbers, the footmen following close behind. The courtyard was a large square of packed dirt; all the exits out of it were firmly shut with spiked iron gates. Men-at-arms stood up on the rooftops all around us. I felt uneasy. We could be slaughtered here, penned like cattle.

Then one of the gates screeched open and Morganna stepped into the sunlight to greet Arthur. She was truly Aphrodite, the most incredibly beautiful woman on earth: hair as dark and lustrous as polished ebony, skin as white as alabaster. Her richly embroidered gown clung to every curve of her body. I glanced at Gawain; his eyes were popping. We all stared at her. I myself felt the desire she raised in every man: powerful, alluring.

At her side stood a tall, broad man with long white hair falling past his shoulders. His beard was white also, and his face was spiderwebbed with age, yet he stood straight as a forest pine, unbent by his years.

At Arthur's command we dismounted from our steeds. He walked slowly toward her and her husband. The rest of us stood stock still. I saw Bors, beside me, nervously eying the rooftops and the men posted there.

"Arthur," said Morganna, smiling. "How good to see you again."

"Queen Morganna," Arthur replied, bowing somewhat stiffly. "I bring you greetings from Ambrosius Aurelianus."

Still smiling, she turned slightly and said, "This is my husband, King Ogier."

"Ogier the Dane," Bors whispered, shocked. "She's sold out to the barbarians."

ARTHUR ACCOMPANIED MORGANNA and her husband, while the rest of us were led to the quarters she had allotted to us. The knights were taken to one of the towers, while we squires were sent to the stables, of course. The footmen and churls were told to find corners of the courtyard where they could spread their blankets.

I didn't see Arthur again until dinner, in the castle's main hall. It wasn't big enough to hold all of Arthur's knights; only a picked dozen were invited to sit at the long feasting table by the huge fireplace. Their squires sat on mean planks down on the packed earth floor.

The dinner was pleasant enough, although very little laughter issued from the head table. Afterward, Arthur motioned for me to accompany him to his quarters in the tower.

When I stepped into his room, I saw that Bors and Gawain were already there, looking gloomy. Lancelot slipped in behind me before I could shut the heavy oaken door. Bors frowned at the young knight, but Arthur merely smiled and waved him to one of the beautifully carved chairs by the bedstead.

"Ogier the Dane," Bors said bitterly. "She's sold her kingdom to a barbarian king."

Arthur spoke more softly. "It must be very difficult for a woman to rule a kingdom. Especially here in the northlands, with the wild tribes constantly raiding."

"It's said she rules through witchcraft," Gawain offered. "Why then would she need a barbarian warrior to be her husband?"

I saw the expression on Arthur's face. He had witnessed Morganna's witchcraft with his own eyes. He had been seduced by her charms, and then nearly murdered by her.

"She bears you no good will," Bors said. "That much is clear, despite her royal reception."

"We are as much her prisoners as her guests," Lancelot said. "I fear that we have stepped into a trap."

Bors looked surprised and impressed with Lancelot's sound sense.

"Why has she married the Dane?" Arthur wondered aloud. "Does Ogier intend to bring his people across the sea to settle here? Must we add the Danes to our list of enemies?"

I decided to find out for myself.

LATE THAT NIGHT, long after our meeting in Arthur's quarters had broken up in just as much puzzlement and uncertainty as it had begun, I got up from my pallet of straw in the stables. The other squires were asleep, snoring and muttering in their dreams. We had posted two guards, and they stood dutifully—if drowsily—by the stable doors.

I told them I couldn't sleep, and walked past them out into the courtyard before they could ask me to take the guard duty and let them rest. It was a cold, clear night. The stars were hard, sharp pinpoints in the black moonless sky. I saw a meteor streak across, silently hurrying as if it had an appointment in the heavens to keep.

Dressed only in my thin linen tunic, wearing no sword nor any weapon except the dagger that Odysseus had given me,

strapped to my thigh, I walked along the shadow of the wall, stepping carefully over the sleeping bodies of Arthur's footmen and camp workers.

Morganna and her husband slept high in the castle's keep, a solid tower that rose at the rear of the courtyard, next to the wall that overlooked the sea. I knew the guards would not grant me entrance; I had no intention of asking them to let me pass.

Keeping to the deep shadow of the wall, I climbed the rough stones of the tower, maneuvering slowly to the seaward side once I got up above the level of the castle wall. There were no guards on this side, with nothing below except the rocky crag and the restless, heaving sea far below. The wind tugged at me, and my fingers grew numb with cold despite my conscious efforts to control my body's internal heat. Still I climbed.

Just below the timbers of the tower's roof was a single window. Not a skinny arrow slit, as would be on the other towers facing potential enemy approaches, but a square window open to the beautiful view of the sea. I hauled myself across its ledge, pushing aside the thick drapes that covered it.

"Destroy this one," Aphrodite hissed.

"Eliminate him for all time."

My eyes had long since adapted to the moonless night, but the interior of the room was even darker. I crouched by the window, peering into the shadows. This seemed to be a sitting room, well furnished but empty of people. Rich tapestries hung on its cold stone walls. Its fireplace, across the straw-covered floor, stood empty and dark.

A door led to a bedroom. I pushed it open slowly, slowly, so that it would not creak. The sullen red embers of a dying fire glowed in the fireplace. I could make out a bulky white-headed body asleep in the bed, one sizable foot sticking out from the blankets: Ogier, alone. Morganna was nowhere in sight.

I concentrated all my willpower on Ogier's sleeping form, praying silently for Anya to help me. Whether she heard me or whether I did it for myself I could not know, but I felt a flash of infinite cold and suddenly I was standing on a grassy hillside in bright warm sunshine, the golden city of the Creators standing beneath its protective bubble of energy down where the hill melted into the sandy beach that fringed the wide, placid, glittering sea.

Ogier was lying on the grass, looking slightly ridiculous in a nightshirt that had ridden up on his rump, exposing his skinny, bony shanks. He sat up abruptly, wide awake, eyes staring with shock and fright.

"Where am I?" he shouted. "Who are you? What has happened to me?"

"No need to fear, my lord," I said calmly. "You are perfectly safe."

He scrambled to his feet, towering over me. "Witchcraft!" he squealed, his voice high with terror.

"You are no stranger to witchcraft," I replied. "You married an enchantress."

Ogier stared at me, his chest heaving. He spun around, then fixed his gaze on me again. Seeing that I was apparently unarmed, he seemed to calm himself somewhat.

"Who are you? What have you done?"

"I want to know why a Danish king has married a British sorceress," I said.

"You're going to break the spell?"

"What spell?"

"She . . ." He hesitated, eyes darting back and forth as if he expected to see someone nearby.

"Morganna?" I prompted.

Suddenly he leaped at me, hands reaching for my throat. He was a big man, and quite strong despite his years. Yet I was stronger. I had been built for violence, designed not merely to fight but to take joy in fighting. A surge of malevolent pleasure raced through me as I ripped his hands from my throat and twisted his arms until he was forced to kneel.

"The witch can't protect you from me," I said sharply. "Now tell me why you have come to Berenicia."

He collapsed, sobbing, onto the grass. I waited for him to gain control of himself.

At last he said, haltingly, "I am old . . . older than you know. I saw the face of death. He warned me that he would come for me soon. Then Morganna came to me . . . she told me she would give me the gift of life . . . she said I could live forever."

"So do the Christians say," I told him.

He grimaced. "Nay, they offer eternity after death, in another world. I mistrust those who say you can live forever, but only after you die."

He was a man who believed only what he could see with his own eyes.

"Morganna told me I could live forever, *here*, on Earth. And I could be become master of all Britain."

That perked up my ears.

"What did she ask of you in return?" I demanded.

"That I marry her and come to Berenicia. That I bring my Danes with me and conquer this island."

"And what of Arthur?"

He looked embarrassed and turned away from me. Staring at the ground, he mumbled, "She said that Arthur would come to castle Berenicia, but he would not leave it. Not alive."

"You dare to interfere, Orion?"

I turned at the sound of her voice. It was Aphrodite, no longer pretending to be a mortal, dressed in a softly draped

robe so sheer that she might as well have been naked. She was magnificent, physically perfect, utterly desirable. Even though I yearned for Anya, the presence of Aphrodite was enough to make me forget my lost love, almost.

Ogier got slowly to his feet, gaping at her. "Morganna, he forced me to tell–"

Aphrodite raised one hand and pointed a finger at him. He fell into silence, frozen like a statue, his mouth still open to form words that could not issue from his throat.

"He won't bother us now," she said, a cruel smile twisting her perfect lips. "And neither will you, anymore."

"You used Hades to frighten him, didn't you?" I accused.

Her smile widened slightly. "Hades put the fear of death into the old man. I offered him the gift of life. He took it willingly."

"Eternal life? For a mortal?"

Now she actually laughed. "Hardly eternal, Orion. He'll live long enough to conquer Britain. That's enough."

"I'll stop you," I said.

"You? Pitiful little creature, stop me? Remember that Aten is on my side in this."

"I'll stop you both."

Suddenly a star seemed to blaze out of the clear blue sky. Brighter and brighter it shone, turning the whole sky into molten copper, hotter and hotter until its glare forced me to throw my arms over my eyes and sink to my knees in agony.

"That's the proper attitude for my creature," said a voice I knew only too well. "You may look upon me, Orion."

I looked up, my eyes watering painfully. There stood Aten, in a splendid gold uniform, his thick mane of golden hair shining like a halo, his tawny eyes gazing down at me in amusement.

"You believe that you can stop me, Orion. Me, who created you? Who built you from atoms of dust and molecules of slime? Every bit of knowledge in your brain was put there by me. Every breath you take is taken only because I allow it."

Slowly I got to my feet, hatred burning deep within me at his sneering, haughty demeanor.

"Yet I fight against you," I said.

He smirked at me. "Not very well, I'm afraid. You've stepped into this trap easily enough."

"Trap?"

"Of course. How else do you think you were able to transport yourself and this mortal here? I brought you here, into the trap I've prepared for you."

"You're lying."

"You'll find out that I'm telling the truth. And once I've put you out of the way, I'll get the other Creators to join me in eliminating Arthur."

"Hades has agreed to stand aside and be neutral," I said hotly. "Anya and others of the Creators oppose you."

"Your precious Anya is far from here," Aten replied. "As for Hades, I don't need him for the moment. He'll return to my side soon enough."

"Destroy this one," Aphrodite hissed. "Eliminate him for all time."

Aten nodded. "I'm afraid she's right, Orion. You've become too difficult to control. It's sad to destroy the work of one's own hands, but . . ." He sighed. "Goodbye, Orion."

I was plunged into darkness, falling, falling in a black pit of doom, hurtling through a void where not even starlight could appear. I felt the cold of interstellar space seeping into my body, pain so deep it was like a thousand sharp blades flaying the flesh from my bones, a cryogenic cold freezing my limbs, my body, my mind. This is the end, I thought, my mind spinning. This is the final oblivion.

My last thought was of Anya. I would never see her, never again hold her. Death did not matter. Pain was meaningless. But being without her, not even able to say a final farewell, that was the ultimate torture.

My body died. The pain overwhelmed me. My bones were snapping, crumbling to dust. The last spark of my being flickered as it was engulfed by the darkness.

Yet I lived. Like an out of body experience, I somehow looked back and saw the poor suffering entity that was me being torn into bloody gobbets of flesh, crushed between invisible hands, torn apart as if on a merciless rack.

Your mind still lives, I heard somehow. *The information that is you still flows through the cosmic spacetime, Orion.*

Is this what death truly is? A bodiless, nonphysical existence, a shadow world of memories and desires, the same dreams and terrors endlessly repeating, echoing across the universes? Yet even as I wondered such thoughts, I could feel my bodiless mind fading, dwindling, dissolving into the final nothingness of ultimate oblivion.

"Focus," a voice said urgently. "Focus before your information pattern thins so much that it is drowned in the meaningless noise of the stars."

Anya's voice! I was certain of it. Perhaps I was insane, grasping at the last shred of hope like a drowning man thrashing for a piece of flotsam to buoy him up. But I was certain that it was Anya speaking to me.

"As long as the energy is there, matter can be formed. The pattern exists, and the body can be shaped from it."

"Anya!" I cried out into the lightless void.

"I am with you, my darling," she answered. "Even from the other side of the universe, from so distant in space and time that numbers lose all meaning, I am with you."

"I love you," I said. With all my being, I meant it.

"There's little I can do to help you, Orion," she said, "except to tell you what must be done. You must save yourself, you must find the strength to overcome the doom that faces you."

"Tell me," I said. "Tell me and I'll do it."

"The pattern of your consciousness is fading, Orion, wafting into the cosmic void like smoke drifting from a snuffed candle. You must focus that pattern, focus your consciousness, your being. You must use your energy to spark the candle into new flame."

I tried, but nothing happened. I concentrated, sought with every scrap of my remaining being to focus the dying pattern of energy that was my being. But nothing happened. I could feel myself growing weaker.

"You're fading!" Anya's voice warned. "Dying."

Her voice. Her being. She was reaching across a universe of spacetime to try to save me, to try to bring me back from final death. She loved me that much. Enough to defy Aten and the other Creators. Enough to risk her own existence in an effort to save me.

I would not let her strive in vain. "I love you, Anya," I called across the lightyears. "I will never stop loving you."

The vision of her, her courage, her loveliness, her love for me, brought new strength to my resolve. I could feel energy sharpening my consciousness, as if the streams of spacetime

were flowing into me. I became a nexus, a protostar, pulling in energy and matter, growing, gaining strength.

"You're doing it!" Anya called from faraway. "You're succeeding!"

Orion the hunter, I thought. *Orion the warrior.* All those abilities that Aten had built into me, all those powers of stamina and tenacity I now used to bring myself back from the oblivion into which he had thrown me.

I am not a toy, not a puppet to be tossed aside when it no longer pleases its master. I am Orion, and I live to do as I will, as I must. I live to find Anya and be with her for eternity.

I blinked my eyes and found myself in the stable at castle Berenicia, alive and whole. I laughed aloud and actually savored the stinks and snores that surrounded me. I was alive, and it felt sweet to be so.

"WHERE HAVE YOU BEEN, Orion?" Arthur demanded.

He looked more worried than angry. I had risen with the dawn and washed in nearly frozen horse trough in the castle courtyard. Arthur, Bors, and Gawain came out of the tower where they had slept as I finished donning my tunic.

Bors's left arm was cradled in a rude sling. He limped noticeably. Gawain's head was wrapped in a blood-stained bandage.

"Orion's been wenching, I'll wager," Gawain said. His usual bright smile was gone. He seemed to wince at the sunlight, as if his head ached terribly.

"When you should be here, with your master," snarled the wounded Bors.

Before I could reply, Arthur said tiredly, "Orion, as my squire you must be at my call always. If you want to go away for a day or two, you must ask me first."

I had been missing for three days, they told me. That surprised me a little, but I was truly shocked to see how battered Bors and Gawain were.

Arthur seemed more relieved to see me again than angry that I had disappeared. He didn't really want an explanation; he wanted to make certain that I wouldn't disappear again unless I first asked his leave. Worse, though, he seemed tired, dispirited, exhausted as though he hadn't slept for days.

I apologized profusely, then asked, "My lord, are you ill? You seem . . . not well."

Arthur shook his head wearily. "How could I be, with all that's happened these past three days."

"Witchcraft," Bors muttered darkly. "There's evil afoot in this castle."

"Is that what happened to you, Sir Bors?" I asked. "And to you, Sir Gawain?"

"No," said Arthur. "What you see is the devilish handwork of King Ogier."

I gaped at the two wounded knights. "The Dane did this to you?"

Bors gave me a look that would have curdled cream. Gawain looked downright embarrassed.

Arthur explained, "I've been trying to find a way to get Ogier to join us. I invited him to become an ally of the High King. I told him that Ambrosius would support him in battles against the Scots and Picts."

Ogier had laughed in Arthur's face, he told me, and declared that he had no need of help from Ambrosius or anyone else. He intended to bring his own Danes from across the sea and march south to take as much of Britain as he wished.

Arthur had patiently explained that such a move would make them enemies, forcing his knights to go to war against the invading Danish army.

"We have beaten every foe we have faced, from the Saxons in the south to the Picts and Scots here north of the Wall," Arthur had told him. "We will defeat your Danes, as well."

"Conquer my Danes!" Ogier roared with laughter and

Lancelot suddenly clutched at his stomach and lurched toward the window. ***. . . then collapsed and puked up his guts onto the floor.***

offered a challenge to Arthur.

"Pick three of your finest, strongest knights. Old man that I am, I will fight them, I myself. If any one of them bests me, I will leave this land and return to Denmark forever."

Arthur immediately accepted the challenge himself, but Ogier declined to fight him.

"Nay, you are too young, little more than a callow youth. Pick three of your best knights. I will fight each of them. After I have defeated them, if you still dare to accept my challenge, then I will fight you—and your enchanted sword. It won't protect you against me," Ogier boasted.

So it was agreed: King Ogier the Dane would face three of Arthur's finest knights, on foot in the castle courtyard. If he defeated all three of them, then Arthur would face the Dane.

Sir Bors had been the first, and tough old Ogier had drubbed him thoroughly. After he was helped off the field of contest, Bors complained of feeling slow, weary, as if sick.

"You certainly looked it," Gawain had quipped as he helped carry the bleeding Bors.

It was Gawain's turn next. The next morning they met in the courtyard again. Gawain looked pale, unsure of himself.

"In a lesser man I would have thought he was frightened," Arthur said as we climbed the tower stairs to the room Morganna had given to young Lancelot.

"I wasn't frightened," Gawain maintained stoutly. "I felt sick. Weak. Feverish, almost."

Still, Gawain put on his helmet and went out to meet Ogier,

sword in hand. The Dane, swift and powerful as a man half his years, cracked Gawain's head so hard that Arthur thought he would die.

"Not so," said Gawain as we entered Lancelot's room. "My skull's too thick, even for Ogier's great strength."

Lancelot was Arthur's last hope. If the challenge of facing Ogier worried the youngster, he didn't show it as he dressed for the contest.

"I won't fail you, Arthur," Lancelot said, smiling eagerly. He actually seemed to be looking forward to the fight as he draped his chain mail over his tunic.

His shield with the golden eagle emblem rested by the table in the center of the room. Atop the table lay Lancelot's sword and his helmet, a steel cylinder that covered the entire head, padded along its bottom rim where it rested on his shoulders.

"How do you feel?" Arthur asked.

Lancelot tried to smile, but it was shaky. "Butterflies in my stomach," he said lightly.

Arthur frowned worriedly. "Both Gawain and Bors felt sick when they faced Ogier."

"Witchcraft," Bors muttered again. "I tell you the witch has put a spell on us all."

Arthur did not contradict him. "I haven't felt all that well myself these past few days," he admitted.

Lancelot took a deep breath. "I feel good enough to face the Dane," he said. Yet I thought that some of his usual vigor and enthusiasm was lacking.

I went to the window and looked down at the courtyard. Ogier was already there, bareheaded, taking practice swings with a mighty broadsword.

Someone knocked at the door. I hurried to open it.

Morganna stood there, midnight dark hair tumbling past her shoulders, a warm disarming smile on her lustrous lips. She bore a silver tray of apples and roasted chestnuts in her hands.

If she was surprised to see that I still lived, she gave no sign of it. Stepping past me as if I didn't really exist, she carried the laden tray straight to Arthur.

"To show that I bear no ill will toward you, Arthur," she said sweetly, handing him the tray.

He had been totally infatuated with her, a year earlier. It was clear to see that she still held a powerful attraction for him.

Arthur had to swallow before he could find his voice. "Thank you, Morganna."

She looked up at him. "I'm sorry that it's come to this, Arthur. Once my husband bests your boy, there, you'll have to face him. He might kill you, Arthur."

"That's in God's hands, Morganna," said Arthur quietly.

"Is it?" she replied.

Gawain chuckled. "Suppose Ogier gets himself killed, my lady? Then you'd be a widow."

She looked at Gawain the way a snake looks at a baby rabbit. "Would you come to console me, then?"

"Aye, I would," said Gawain, reaching for one of the shining apples on the tray. He crunched into it with his strong white teeth. "I would indeed."

Morganna smiled at him. "Very well then. Should I put on a widow's black weeds, you may come to beguile me of my grief."

With that she turned and swept out of the room, leaving Arthur holding the tray of fruit and Gawain munching thoughtfully on the apple.

Lancelot picked up one of the apples. "A bite or two might help calm my stomach," he said.

Bors stared hard at the closed door. "Witch," he growled. "She put a spell on me. On us all."

"No," said Arthur, putting the fruit tray on the table. "But she might win Gawain's heart."

Gawain said, "It's not my heart that—" He stopped, his face going pale. His legs buckled. I raced to him and caught him before he collapsed to the floor.

"I'm . . . sick . . ." Gawain moaned.

Lancelot suddenly clutched at his stomach and lurched toward the window. He made it only as far as the corner of the bed, then collapsed and puked up his guts onto the floor.

"The apples!" said Arthur. "They're poisoned."

Without an instant's hesitation I pried Gawain's mouth open and stuck two fingers down his throat. He gagged, then retched. It was a mess, but it probably saved his life. The remains of the apple came up, together with the breakfast Gawain had gobbled earlier.

We laid the two of them side by side on Lancelot's bed while his squire ran for a maid or two to clean up the vomit.

Gawain groaned, but the color came back to his face. "The witch . . . poisoned me."

"It was meant for me," Arthur said. "She still hates me, despite her smiles."

Lancelot was unconscious, pale as death.

"Lancelot's in no shape to fight Ogier," Bors said. "And if he doesn't show up, the Dane will claim a forfeit."

"Then he'll demand to face me," Arthur said. He too looked pale, unwell.

I knew what was racing through Arthur's mind: If Ogier wins his challenge he will bring his army of Danes to Berenicia. From there they will invade south, bringing a whole new flood of enemies to spread fire and death across Britain.

But I saw a different scene. Morganna had been subtly poisoning the knights' food for days now. Bors and Gawain had both been too ill to fight well. Morganna's poisoned apples were meant to make certain that Lancelot could not even make it to the field of contest. Arthur would be forced to fight Ogier and the Dane was going to kill him. Morganna/Aphrodite had hatched this scheme to assassinate Arthur.

I looked into Arthur's eyes. "I'll go in Lancelot's place, my lord."

"You?" Bors snapped. "You're only a squire. That Dane out there will cleave you in half."

"I can fight him," I insisted. "In Lancelot's armor, so no one will know that Lancelot didn't show up."

"It would never work," Bors grumbled.

But Arthur said, "Can you best Ogier, do you think?"

I realized that Morganna had given the old Dane more than an extended lifespan. Aphrodite and Aten must have enhanced his body, augmented his muscular strength, amplified his reflexes. I recalled fighting for Odysseus before the walls of Epeiros, a thousand years before Alexander the Great conquered the Persian empire. Then I faced Aten himself, in mortal guise, swifter and stronger than any mere human could be. The best I could do was a draw: We killed each other.

"I will beat him, my lord," I said firmly. Then I had to add,

"Or die trying."

Arthur nodded, his mouth a grim tight line. "No one could ask you to do more."

So I put on Lancelot's coat of chainmail. It was a bit short for me, but we hoped no one would notice. I hefted his heavy shield with the golden eagle painted on it.

"I'll give you Excalibur . . ." Arthur began.

"No need, my lord," I said as Lancelot's squire buckled his sword around my waist. "Excalibur is meant for you alone."

We left Lancelot and Gawain in the tower room with their squires. Arthur commanded the youngsters to open the door to no one except himself. Down the long spiral of stone stairs we went, until we reached the ground level. Then I pulled Lancelot's helmet over my head. It covered my face completely. The world shrank to what I could see through the narrow eye slit in the steel helm.

Ogier stood waiting at the far end of the courtyard, tall, his shoulders as wide as two axe handles, twirling a two-handed broadsword in his right hand as if it were a toy. The courtyard was thronged with people who had come to watch the match, buzzing and chattering with excitement. Only the center of the packed earth courtyard was open for our contest. Almost everyone in the castle must have been there—except, I noticed, for the men at arms stationed on the rooftops, armed with stout bows.

Morganna stood beside her husband. Even through the narrow eyeslits of the helmet I could see that she was surprised that Lancelot had made it down to the courtyard. She stared hard at me, her beautiful face twisted into a puzzled frown.

Ogier wore a long coat of chainmail over his tunic, as did I. A squire stood beside him holding his long shield; it bore the emblem of a stag, in black. Its tapered bottom end rested on the dirt, its square top reached to the lad's eyes. Ogier handed his sword to another squire, and took his helmet from a third. The helmet bore steel prongs, like a stag's antlers, and a gold circlet of a crown affixed to it. Ogier would do battle with a king's crown on his head—or at least, on his helmet.

"He is very fast and very strong," Arthur warned me. "Be on your guard."

I nodded inside my helmet. "Wish me luck, my lord."

"May the gods be with you," Arthur said, lapsing back to his Roman heritage. Probably he unconsciously thought that the Christian God was too meek to be of help in battle.

I stepped out into the open space as the crowd hushed expectantly. Ogier's helmet covered his cheeks and had a flat piece between the eyes to protect his nose. The bottom half of his face was uncovered; his snow-white beard fell halfway down his chest.

"So, lad, you too have come to feel the bite of my blade," he said in a loud, strong voice.

I said nothing as I advanced slowly, warily toward him.

"Come then," Ogier said cheerfully. "Let us see who is the better man."

My senses went into overdrive, as they always do in battle. Everything around me slowed down, as if time itself was stretching out into a languid, sluggish flow. A good thing, too, for Ogier was every bit as swift as a lightning bolt.

He swung a mighty overhand blow meant to cleave my skull, helmet and all. I jumped backward and his swing cut empty air, instead. Without an instant's pause he swung backhand at me, advancing swiftly as I backed away.

"Stand and fight," he growled. "This isn't a dancing contest."

I was content to dance, at least until I could gauge the speed of his reflexes. I circled around the courtyard, Ogier pursuing me, as the crowd shifted and melted away from us. For several minutes the only sounds were the hissing swishes of his blade cutting through the air and the crowd's gasps as I backpeddled lithely. Not once did our swords clash.

He sprang at me with another powerful overhand swing.

The force of his blow buckled my knees . . .

He showed no signs of slowing, only a growing impatience with my retreating tactic.

"Coward!" he snapped. "Face me like a man, you spineless cur."

I had no intention of walking into that buzzsaw he was wielding. Not until I was ready.

Around the courtyard we went, Ogier charging and me retreating. I nearly stumbled once, when I got close to where Morganna was standing. Did she somehow trip me? I couldn't tell. But I could see Arthur's face as he watched the match. He looked aghast, ashamed of what I was doing. Better to wade in manfully and be chopped to bloody bits, in his eyes, than to appear to be afraid of your enemy.

Ogier showed no sign of slowing down or becoming winded. If anything, he pursued me harder, swinging his blade so fast it was a blur against the clear blue sky even to my hypersensitized eyes.

After three times around the courtyard I thought I had his swing timed well enough. I suddenly stopped my retreat, and lunged toward Ogier, raising my shield to take his thrust while I swung at his midsection.

His blow shattered my shield. It simply cracked apart, half of it flying off into the crowd, the other half hanging useless from my arm. The force of the blow staggered me; my whole arm went numb. My own swing bounced harmlessly off his shield.

"Ha!" he roared, rushing toward me as I stumbled back.

I ducked beneath his swing and wedged my sword against the inside of his shield. Then I jabbed the point of the blade into his ribs. There was little force in my thrust, and the blade slid harmlessly against his chainmail.

But for the first time in our fight, Ogier backed up. The crowd went "Ooh!"

For a moment we stood facing each other, chests heaving, arms heavy. I tossed away the remnant of my shield. Past Ogier's imposing form I could see Morganna smiling.

"So you're ready to fight now?" he taunted me.

I said nothing, waiting for his next attack.

He sprang at me with another powerful overhand swing. I gripped my sword in both hands and parried his blade with a mighty clang that rang off the courtyard walls. The force of his blow buckled my knees, but I managed to back away and regain my balance.

Ogier came forward with still another overhand cut. This time I dodged it and swung two-handed at the haft of his blade, close to the hilt. My blow ripped the sword from his hand.

The courtyard fell absolutely silent. Ogier stood for an instant, staring down at his sword on the dusty ground. Then he looked at me. I saw what was in his eyes. He realized that I could have just as easily taken off his hand, severed it at the wrist.

I stepped back and allowed him to pick up his sword. He hefted it, as if testing to see if it were still whole and sharp. Then he advanced upon me again, but not so wildly this time. Now he was grimly determined to finish me off.

Holding his shield before him, Ogier moved warily toward me, swishing his sword in swift circles over his head. The shield covered him from knees to eyes. He was taking no chances against me now.

I backed away for several steps, thinking rapidly, trying to find a weakness, an opening. From another life I remembered a martial arts instructor urging me, "Your enemy cannot strike without exposing himself to a counter strike. Be alert. Be prepared. Use your enemy's strength to conquer him."

Suddenly Ogier roared like a bull and charged at me, ready to use his shield as a battering ram. I dropped to the ground and took his legs out from under him with a rolling block. He fell like a giant oak tree, landing face down on his shield.

I planted one foot on his sword arm and knelt my other leg on the small of his back. Ripping off his golden crowned helmet, I pointed my sword at the nape of his neck.

"Yield, my lord," I shouted, "or I shall have to cut off your head."

Ogier had no desire to lose his head. "I yield," he said, his voice quavering.

WE WERE NOT completely out of danger. That night Ogier feasted us, and Lancelot had to accept the plaudits of one and all as an invincible champion. He looked embarrassed, which everyone took to be humility, the kind of modesty that becomes a true knight.

We dared not eat anything except the sizzling meat of the boar that we saw being roasted on a huge spit in the great hall's fireplace. Nor would any of Arthur's men drink anything except water, by his command. He'd had enough of poison.

Ogier ate and drank mightily, but he seemed to have aged twenty years since the morning. He looked thinner, slower, his eyes red rimmed and watery. Have Aten and Aphrodite already removed whatever it was that made the old Dane so youthful? I wondered.

He agreed good naturedly that he would return to Denmark and never darken Britain's shores again.

"If you have knights like young Lancelot in your service," he said to Arthur as they sat side by side at the long dining table, "then I will keep my army in Denmark and harry the Frisians and Saxons there."

Arthur smiled graciously. I thought that Ogier's harrying would only lead to more Frisians and Saxons crossing the sea to Britain, but I was satisfied that the Danes would not invade.

Morganna sat at Ogier's other side, smiling mysteriously through the entire evening. That worried me. She did not appear to be angry or frustrated that her plot to kill Arthur had failed. She smiled like the Sphinx, like someone who is willing to wait for long ages to accomplish her goal.

The next morning, as we were ready to saddle up and leave Berenicia for the long trek back to Cadbury castle, Morganna came into the sun-drenched courtyard to say farewell to Arthur. Several of her ladies accompanied her.

"Will you go to Denmark with your husband?" Arthur asked bluntly.

Again that Sphinx like smile. "No, I will stay here. This is my home, not some rude swamp across the sea."

"But what of Ogier, then?"

"What of him?" she replied carelessly. "He is old and will die soon. He serves me no purpose anymore."

Arthur shook his head. Then he fixed Morganna with a hard stare. "You wanted to see me killed."

"I will dance on your grave one day, Arthur."

He seemed more saddened than alarmed. "What have I done to earn such hatred?"

Morganna smiled again and beckoned to one of her waiting ladies. The woman bore an infant, asleep in a bundle of swaddling clothes.

"This is what you've done," said Morganna, taking the baby in her arms.

Arthur gaped at the child.

"He is your son, Arthur. I will raise him to hate you as much as I do."

"But Morganna," he pleaded, "you mustn't—"

"I will, Arthur. He will know that you are his father and he will hate you with every fiber of his being."

Arthur simply stared at her, uncomprehending, bewildered.

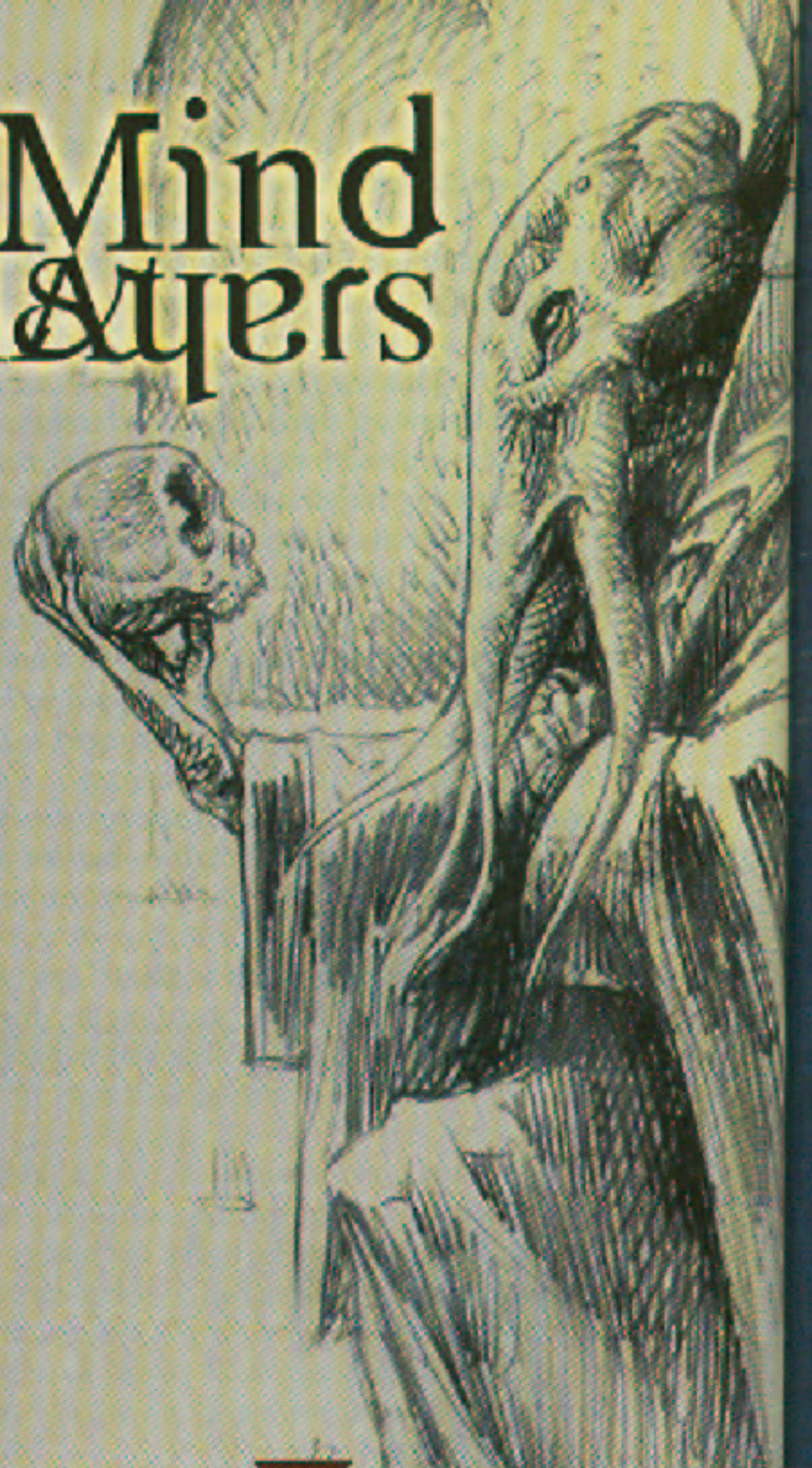
"I've named him Modred," she said, her smile turning truly evil. "He will be the instrument of your doom."

Yes, I thought. Aphrodite and Aten and the other Creators would not rest until they had destroyed Arthur. They had all the time they needed to put their hateful plans into action. Could I protect Arthur all through those long years?

I vowed that I would.

Previous adventures of Orion and Arthur have appeared in DRAGON *#248, 257, 263, and 274. For more on the many works of Dr. Ben Bova, go to www.benbova.net.*

Mind flayers



MIND BLAST

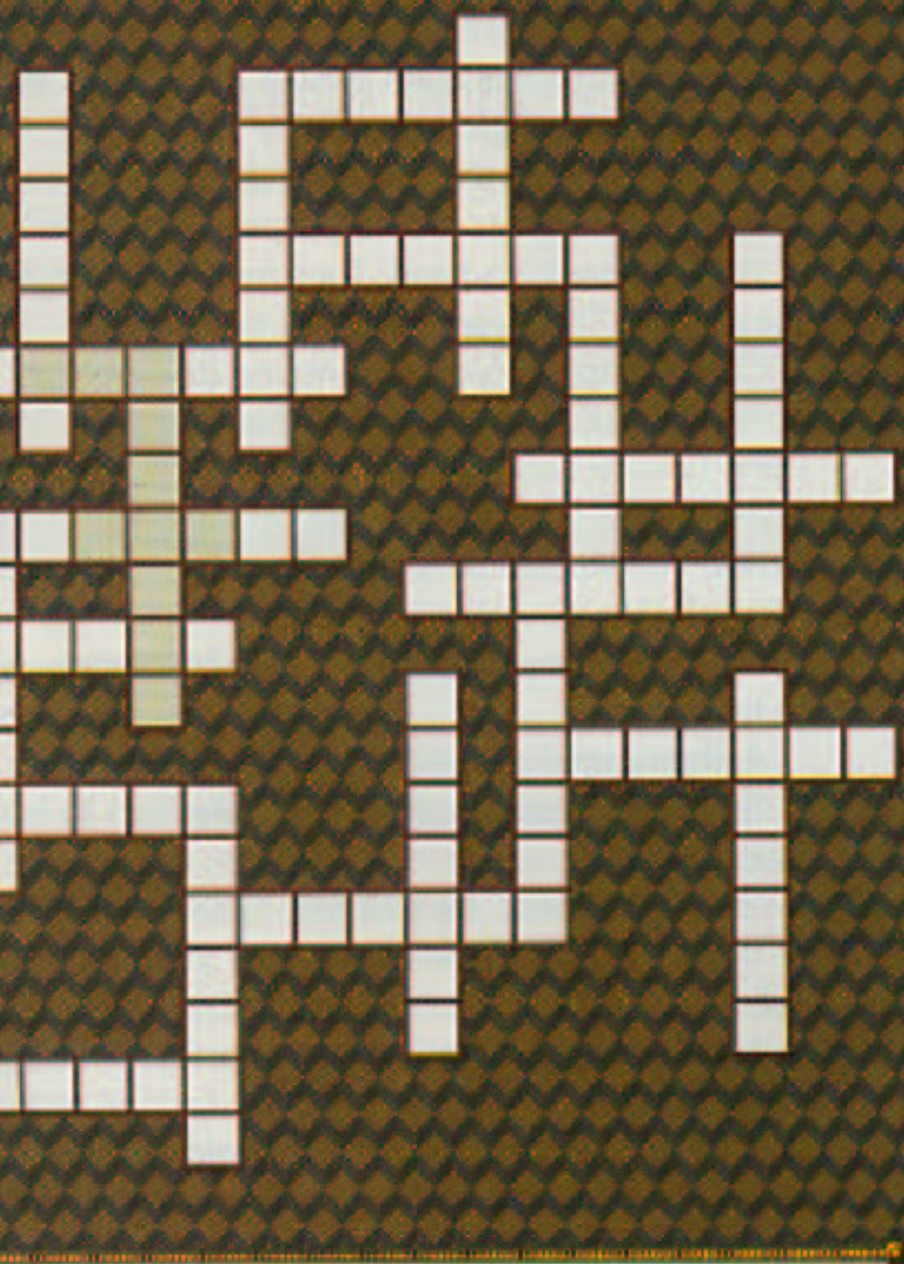
You might need a *crystal ball* to get these readings. What magical item's name is comprised of the letters in the word READINGS, each used as many times as you like?

You can find the solution to this *MIND BLAST* on page 66

no. 25

by Mike Selinker

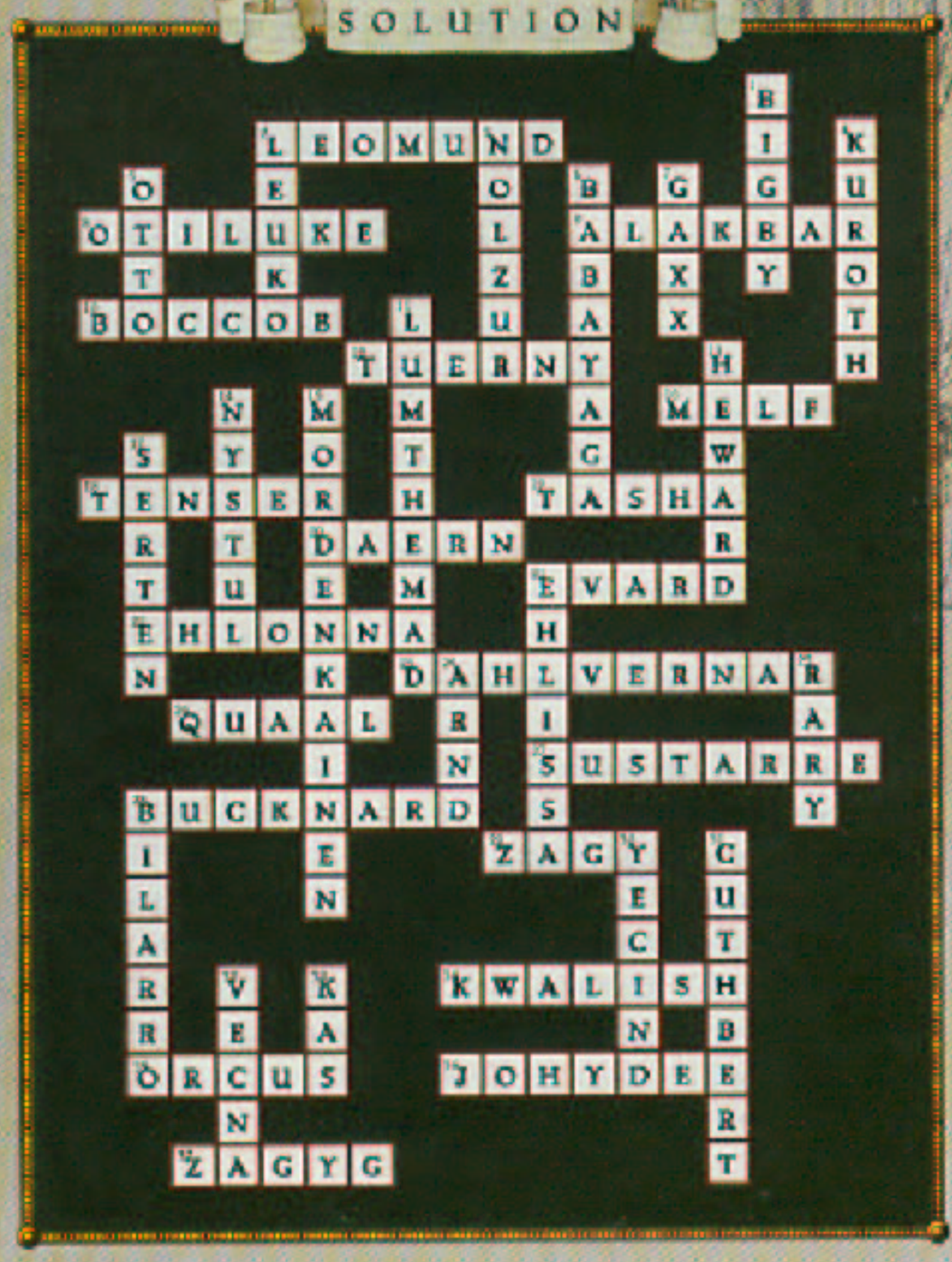
Once again, a group of numerically-obsessed spellcasters has left their symbol in a grid. Hot on the heels of the Council of Five comes the College of Seven, a cadre of spellcasters who only cast *Player's Handbook* spells which total seven letters apiece. Place the spells across and down in the grid.



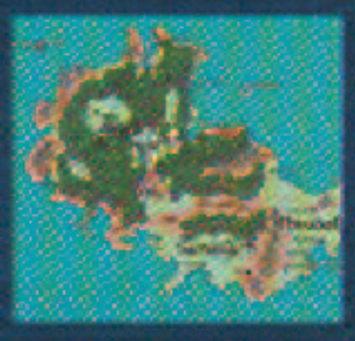
SPELLS

ACID FOG	ENLARGE	MIND FOG	SHATTER
AIR WALK	EYEBITE	MIRACLE	SILENCE
BINDING	FREEDOM	MISLEAD	SUNBEAM
COMMAND	LIVEOAK	SCRYING	TONGUES
COMMUNE	MENDING	SEEMING	
EMOTION	MESSAGE	SENDING	

no. 24 SOLUTION



Campaign Cartographer 2



CC2 is the industry-standard design software and now it's more flexible than ever before.

Windows 95/98/2000*

You can fractalise any shape to create realistic terrain. Export high-resolution images for publication or the web. Print across multiple sheets of paper at any scale for huge, impressive maps. And that's just a sample. With improved help and a new 170-page manual, CC2 version 6 is the only mapping software for the discerning gamer.

Character Artist

The Character Artist add-on to CC2 lets you create attractive, high-quality portraits of characters for your games. Select from the basic races such as human, elf and dwarf, or choose horrific humanoid monsters. Just click on icons to choose the race and sex, then select body parts and clothes to build your portrait. Add the portrait to character sheets, square counters or stand-up card figures.

CC2 Dioramas

The CC2 Dioramas add-on to CC2 lets you create easily assembled 3D card models for use with miniatures. It includes hundreds of pre-defined parts including modular corridor sections, traps, treasure and buildings. The dioramas can be printed accurately at any miniature scale and are re-useable. You can use Dioramas to create new nets, automatically adding attractive backgrounds and tabs.

City Designer 2

The CD2 add-on to CC2 is the only RPG tool that lets you create beautiful, incredibly detailed city maps with easy and speed. Create houses in any style or shape, add whole streets in a couple of clicks, or select from over 1500 Smart Symbols to make the city of your dreams. Add a hotlinked alphabetical street index to your map in no time, and include color-coded demographic information. You can create impressive city maps in a handful of minutes, and have more time for actually gaming instead of preparing.

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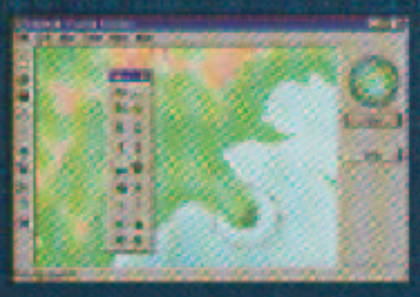

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CAMPAIGN CORNER

FORGOTTEN REALMS®

DUNGEON MASTER BACKGROUND — **BY ROB HEINSOO**

The hybsils of the Western Heartlands and the High Forest have a grudge against the Zhents of Darkhold. The Zhents pay bounty for hybsils' antlers, so long as they're attached to a hysbil's scalp.

A defector from Darkhold, unhappy about the Zhents' reversion to the worship of Bane, has revealed that Sememmon was creating a huge ball of hybsil antlers for some dark ritual purpose. The informant isn't sure what Sememmon's intentions were, but it had something to do with plans to take control of forests abandoned by the elves in the Retreat.

Before those plans could come to fruition, Sememmon fled Darkhold and the wrath of Bane, leaving the ball of antlers behind. The new commanders of Darkhold don't really know what to do with the ball. Not wanting to leave it inside Darkhold, in case Sememmon should want the ball badly enough to come back for it, they have moved it to a smaller watch post in the Far Hills.

The hybsils want the antlers of their slain kin back, to dispose of them with proper reverence and prevent them from being used by evil mages. The PCs might end up aiding the hybsils' mission or they might end up going after the hybsils to try and rescue them from what could be a terrible trap. But would it be a trap for hybsils, or a trap for Sememmon?

GREYHAWK® ACCESSORY

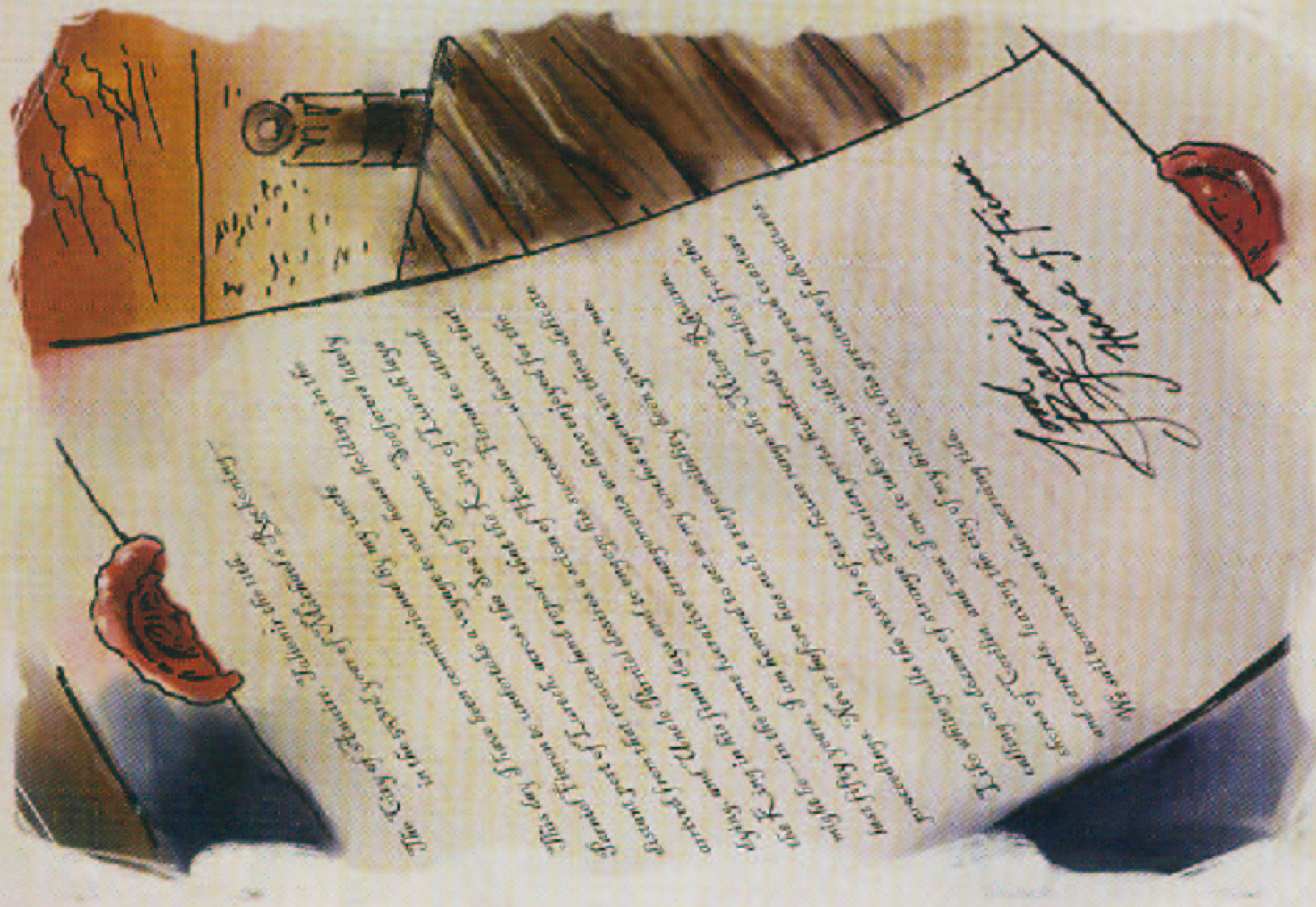
DUNGEON MASTER BACKGROUND — **BY BRUCE R. CORDELL**

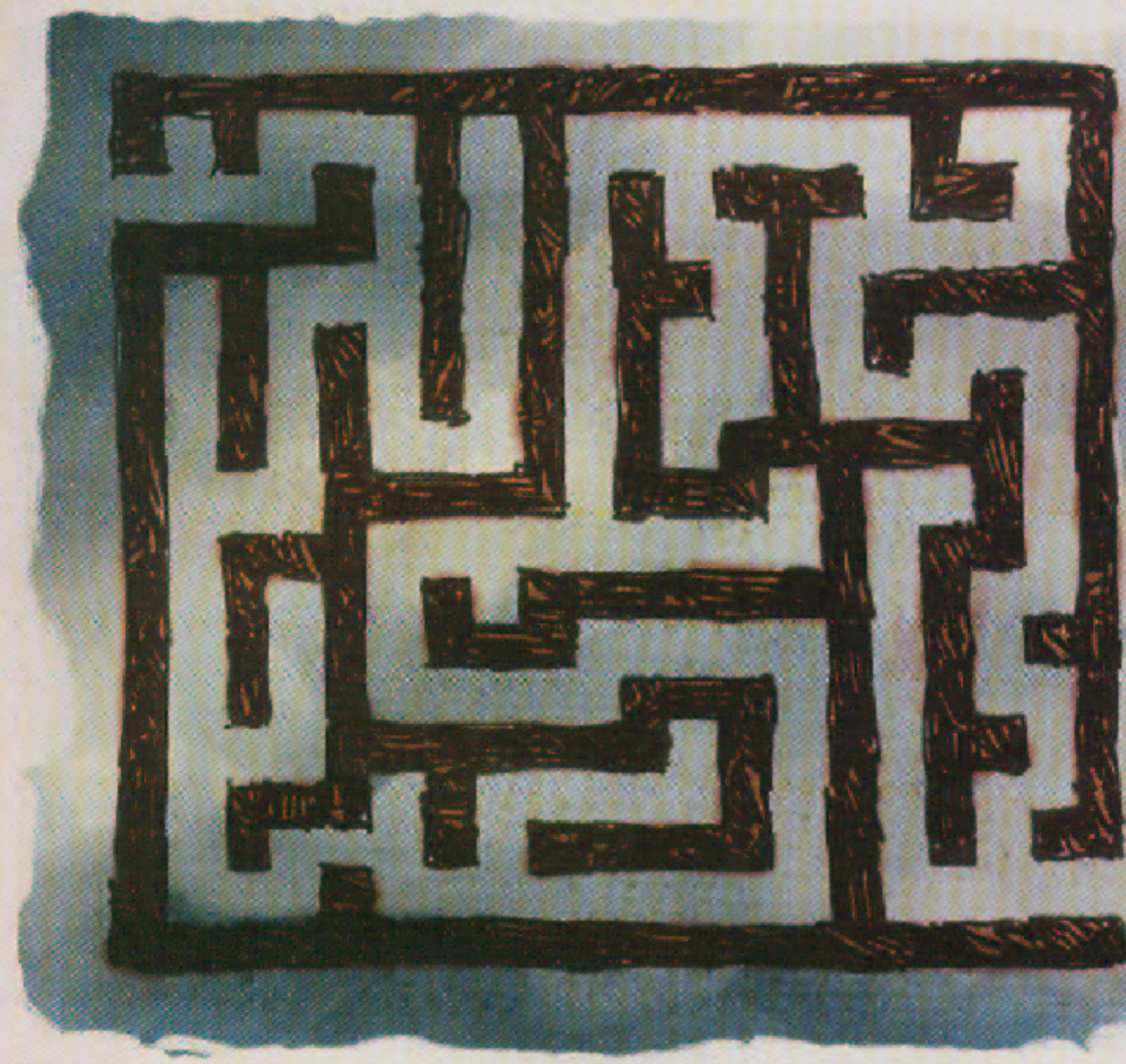
In a wide area in front of the Cartographer's Guildhall, Master Cartographer Jawan Sumbar (a gnome male 5th-level rogue/15th-level wizard (illusionist) has erected a huge tent. Inside, trophies gathered from forgotten dungeons both near and far are displayed. PCs willing to pay the 1 sp admission can see several cases of strange cultural artifacts, statues, stuffed monsters, and stranger exhibits. Examples include the famed evil sword Blackrazor (a replica), a stuffed and mounted mind flayer, a stuffed and mounted very young black dragon, a glass jar filled with muddy water (purportedly gathered from the Sunless Sea), and an 8-ft. tall statue of a 3-armed gargoyle (its fourth arm has apparently been broken off and is nowhere to be found).

Though many of the items are fakes and replicas, some are real, and Jawan usually posts a guard of three 4th-level fighters to patrol the exhibit tent. Unfortunately, the guards are not up to the task of fighting off the wrathful appearance of four demons: a glabrezou and three vrocks. The demons are after something taken from a tomb they and many of their kind are charged with keeping pristine. The statue of the gargoyle is their target, and they stop at nothing to return it to the far-away tomb whence it was taken by some foolish adventuring party. PCs who are present during the attack can help beat off the demons if they so choose. Sadly, even if all the demons are killed, a new retrieval force is dispatched every week until the statue is reclaimed.

Answer to Mind Blade: ASSASSIN'S DAGGER.

SEE A
SALVAGE
EXHIBIT
AT THE
CARTOGRAPHER'S
GUILD HALL
ALL PROCEEDS
GO TOWARD THE
CONSTRUCTION
OF AN EXHIBIT HALL





If ya wanna hear what happened to Factol Vergrove and Factol Darius, open your eyes. Ex-members of the Godsmen and Signers'll tell ya they ascended but that's just barmy talk to throw nosy herks off. The high-ups in the Mind's Eye don't want to hear about those factols anymore. They have a new one and chant is that people talking to Seekers about Vergrove or Darius don't ask anymore.

DUNGEON MASTER BACKGROUND

BY RICHARD BAKER

The City of Anuire is home to dozens of noble merchant-houses, trading costers whose ships sail to all corners of Cerilia: and beyond to the great old cities of Aduria, the golden sands of Djapar, the sun-drenched archipelago of the Sahirde el-Mehare, and the exotic mysteries of the Dragon Isles of the east.

House Fieren is one of these merchant houses, a family of landless gentry descended from knights who fought at the side of Michael Roele. Two galleons, six caravels, and three coasters comprise the Fieren fleet. In the early summer of the year 553 MR, Baeris Fieren sets out to inspect his house's holdings in the kingdoms and ports of northern Aduria.

Noble merchants such as Baeris frequently travel with friends and reliable companions, especially for long voyages abroad. The heroes might be hired (or simply asked) to join Baeris on the journey to Lurech.

Other Options

The BIRTHRIGHT campaign is close enough to the fantasy Medieval ideal that merely changing some of the location names can make this hook a good fit for GREYHAWK, the FORGOTTEN REALMS, or even the MYSTARA Campaign.

DUNGEON MASTER BACKGROUND

BY EDWARD BONNY

PCs are deliberately given this thought-provoking message. DMs should change the factols involved to suit individual campaigns. Freeing any factol comes with its own hazards, the least of which would be possibly incurring the Lady of Pain's displeasure. A freed factol is sure to be sought out by friends and foes, and your options from that point are endless. Consider these:

- One or both factols are injured, sick, or dying. A timely rescue from the maze would be the just the beginning of an adventure.
- There is no map of any factol's maze. This chant is really a trap set out by the Daughters of Light or enemies of the PCs.
- When Vergrove and Darius learn of the fate of their two factions, they pledge to see Mind's Eye's disbanded. The factols enlist any leftover PC Godsmen and Signers in this endeavor. Seeker high-ups might have their own plans for the freed factols.

The return of any mazed factol soon prompt new searches for other factols.

Are the PCs not believing any of this? Have them talk to the githyanki maze-mapper, Djek'Nlarr. She's seen them both recently and even mapped their maze. She says those two ascended all right. They ascended together courtesy of the Lady.

Other Options

If you don't use the PLANESCAPE setting, you can make this handout work in one of two ways:

- It's a hook to bring your characters off the Prime and into Sigil itself. This is a good option if you have the PLANESCAPE setting and your PCs want to travel the Planes.

- The note refers to political or religious factions in a foreign city, and the note is written in the unusual cant of the local thieves guild. A successful Innuendo skill check (DC 13) makes the message's meaning clear to those who don't already know the lingo.

CLASS ACTS

LIGHTBEARER

BY MONTE COOK • ILLUSTRATED BY PETER BERGTING

Sometimes those who are pure of heart and icons of goodness are not necessarily those most devoted to a particular religion. Sometimes, as the gnome and halfling lightbearers prove, an individual mortal, rather than a god and his legion of servants, is evil's greatest foe.

The heroes of the gnomes and halflings seem particularly focused on protection and stewardship. The powerful spirits of those who are the most pure, truthful, and valiant shine through them, marking them as special. Halfling and gnome cultures select these rare few as guardians called lightbearers. The power within these individuals grants them a special aura of purity and righteousness. Lightbearers serve as guardians, peacekeepers, and general purveyors of goodness. Their aura—normally an invisible, shimmering, warm glow undetectable to the naked eye—sometimes becomes visible when the lightbearer is engaged in melee combat with evil foes.

Lightbearers are often clerics or druids, but rangers, bards, and most other classes are also granted the gift. "Holiness" is not just a quality of the religious.

As NPCs, lightbearers are usually wandering loners, stopping only where and when they are needed. They never tie themselves down to a single community and are never associated with one particular religion.

LIGHTBEARER

HIT DIE: D8

Level	Attack Bonus	Fort. Save	Ref. Save	Will Save	Special
1	+0	+2	+2	+2	*Detect evil, light*
2	+1	+3	+3	+3	*Resist elements*
3	+2	+3	+3	+3	Share aura, deflect attacks +2
4	+3	+4	+4	+4	*Provide healing*
5	+3	+4	+4	+4	Darkvision
6	+4	+5	+5	+5	Deflect attacks +4
7	+5	+5	+5	+5	*Dispel evil*
8	+6	+6	+6	+6	*Holy word*
9	+6	+6	+6	+6	Deflect attacks +6
10	+7	+7	+7	+7	Resist spells

CLASS SKILLS

Skill Points at Each Level: 2 + Int modifier

The lightbearer's class skills (organized by key ability) are:

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
		Concentration	Craft Knowledge (religion) Knowledge (local) Spellcraft	Heal Listen Profession Spot Wilderness Lore	Diplomacy Intimidate

CLASS REQUIREMENTS

To qualify to become a lightbearer, a character must fulfill all the following criteria:

Alignment: Any good
Race: Gnome or halfling
Knowledge (religion): 8 ranks
Knowledge (local): 4 ranks
Diplomacy: 4 ranks
Feats: Alertness

CLASS FEATURES

Weapon and Armor Proficiency: Lightbearers do not gain special proficiency with any weapons, armor, or shields.

Detect Evil: At will, the lightbearer can *detect evil* as a spell-like ability. This ability duplicates the effects of the spell *detect evil* as cast by a cleric of the lightbearer's level.

Light: At will, the lightbearer can create *light* as a spell-like ability. This ability duplicates the effects of the spell *light* as cast by a cleric of the lightbearer's level.

Resist Elements: As a spell-like ability, the lightbearer can cast *resist elements* upon himself once per day as a cleric of his lightbearer level.

Share Aura: Some benefits gained from being a lightbearer—deflect attacks, *resist elements*, and resist spells—can be shared with one other creature in physical contact with the Lightbearer. Using this supernatural ability is a free action.

Deflect Attacks: At 3rd, 6th, and 9th level, the lightbearer gains a deflection bonus to his Armor Class. This is a supernatural ability.

Provide Healing: Once per day, the lightbearer can use one of the following as a spell-like ability: *remove disease, remove blindness/deafness, cure serious wounds, restoration.* All of these abilities are treated as if cast by a cleric of the lightbearer's level.

Darkvision: At 5th level, the lightbearer gains darkvision with a 100-foot range. This is a supernatural ability.

Dispel Evil: A 7th-level lightbearer can use *dispel evil* as a spell-like ability once per day, as a cleric of his lightbearer level.

Holy Word: At 8th level, a lightbearer can speak a *holy word* as a spell-like ability once per day, as a cleric of his lightbearer level.

Resist Spells: A 10th-level lightbearer has an SR of 25. D

THE BESTIARY

SPAWN of ELEMENTAL EVIL

BY JAMES JACOBS · ILLUSTRATED BY CARLO ARELLANO

The Gnarley Forest has had a reputation as a den of monsters and lurking evil for many years, despite the fact that large sections of the woods are regularly patrolled by rangers, elves, gnomes, and other champions of good. Nevertheless, the forest's sinister reputation has persisted, in no small part thanks to one of the most infamous strongholds of cruelty and villainy throughout the Flanaess: the Temple of Elemental Evil.

The history of the Temple of Elemental Evil is no secret; the massive structure was built by a cult that venerated the dark and evil aspects of the four elements. With the aid of powerful demons and gods like Iuz the Old, Zuggtmoy the Demoness Lady of Fungi, and other sinister powers, these cultists soon commanded much power, and began to ravage the lands in the area. Eventually the Temple's reign of terror was put down and Zuggtmoy was imprisoned deep within the dungeons under the Temple

The cultists had done their damage, though. The presence of the Temple of Elemental Evil tainted the surrounding woodlands. Natural creatures fled the area and all manner of twisted monsters and beasts moved in, drawn by the evil aura of the place. In addition, many of the evil creatures the cultists held bargains with or kept as pets and guardians remained in the area after the Temple itself was overthrown. Over the years, these creatures spread into the surrounding woods and established themselves. This article details five of those beings that still lurk deep within the Gnarley Woods or in the ruined dungeons beneath its roots.

During the height of the Temple of Elemental Evil's power long ago, the breathdrinker was a favorite assassin for Temple priests. The creature's skill at tracking and its great speed made it unnaturally adept at stalking prey. Reports of vengeful ghosts that haunt the Gnarley Woods today might well be the result of breathdrinker encounters. It is certain that many of these creatures lurk in the woods near the Temple ruins waiting for prey.

The cult also kept many creatures as guardians or pets. One of the most popular were the sadistic firetongue frogs, tiny fire creatures that could set living blood aflame and were notoriously difficult to slay. Certain Temple holdings were lit entirely by these glowing frogs, and not a few of these structures burned to the ground when the frogs grew a little too bored or hungry. Firetongue frogs dislike water and thus are only rarely encountered in the often moist woodlands, but large swarms of the creatures still lurk in forgotten dungeons in the woods.

The cultists built many underground dungeons during their reign, and they often broke into existing caverns or passageways into the Underdark. One of these caverns had already been claimed by a band of strange creatures called tralusks. Sinister and cruel to the core, these terrifying monsters communicated by means of deep, eerie songs that carried for miles through the lightless tunnels of the Underdark. The tralusks also had a strong affinity for elemental earth, a property the cultists seized upon as a divine sign. Many of the creatures were led back to the Temple dungeons to serve as guardians and entertainment; their voices were perfectly suited for the croaking, moaning hymns to Elemental Evil. Today, with the cult gone, most of the tralusks have retreated into the Underdark, but some might still lair in the deeper dungeons in the region.

High priests of the cult often conjured creatures from other realms to serve as advisors or elite troops. One of these conjured beings, the orlythys, proved to be especially useful, as this race of otherworldly slavers could spawn water elementals from the stolen bodily fluids of their victims. Certain chapters of the cult made a brisk business of trading captured men and women to orlythys slavers for water elemental minions. Several permanent gateways to the orlythys' home plane were constructed in no less than five dreary boglands deep in the Gnarley Forest. These gates remain today and serve as staging points for orlythys merchants looking for new slaves.

Another of these conjured creatures was known only to a select few high priests. This was a powerful outsider summoned from the court of Zuggtmoy to aid in running the cult. These creatures, known as rukarazylls, took the guise of human cultists and were often put in charge of indoctrinating new members into the cult. The rukarazylls preferred to delude these new recruits into believing they were joining a much more benign cult; by the time the new members learned the truth, it was too late to escape. Since the fall of the Temple, the rukarazylls have maintained a terrible interest in the region, and in the following years have attempted to bring the cult back to power many times. Whether they succeed in these goals remains to be seen.

BREATHDRINKER

Medium-size Air Elemental (Air, Evil)

Hit Dice:	8d8+24 (60 hp)
Initiative:	+6 (+2 Dex, +4 Improved Initiative)
Speed:	Fly 80 ft. (perfect)
AC:	16 (+2 Dex, +4 natural)
Attacks:	1 wind scythe +6 melee
Damage:	Wind scythe 2d4
Face/Reach:	5 ft. by 5 ft./5 ft.
Special Attacks:	Air mastery, gaze of terror, steal breath
Special Qualities:	Damage reduction 10/+1, elemental traits, invisibility
Saves:	Fort +5, Ref +8, Will +3
Abilities:	Str 11, Dex 14, Con 16, Int 14, Wis 12, Cha 14
Skills:	Hide +12, Move Silently +8, Search +12, Spot +7, Wilderness Lore +9
Feats:	Flyby Attack, Improved Initiative, Track
Climate/Terrain:	Any temperate
Organization:	Solitary
Challenge Rating:	7
Treasure:	None
Alignment:	Always chaotic evil
Advancement Range:	9-16 HD (Large), 17-24 (Huge)

The breathdrinker is a dreadful elemental that feeds on air extracted from the lungs of living creatures. It is not known how the breathdrinker derives sustenance from such a source, but it is obvious that the cruel monster takes great delight in stealing the breath of helpless victims.

The breathdrinker is normally invisible, except when it is attacking or using its special attacks. At this time, the creature roughly mimics the form of its chosen victim, appearing as a misty, translucent duplicate. The eyes of a breathdrinker appear as tiny red spheres of light.

Breathdrinkers speak Common and Auran.

COMBAT

A breathdrinker lurks invisibly when at rest, waiting for prey to wander near. The creature spends some time stalking and watching its victims so it can analyze the best method of attack. The breathdrinker is single-minded to a fault; once it selects a victim it will not rest until it has fully fed from the creature's lungs. It defends itself by lashing others with a scythe-shaped plane of pressurized air. It never uses its wind scythe attack against its chosen victim, however. A breathdrinker often chooses to track its victim and waits for the unfortunate creature to fall asleep before attempting to steal its breath. A satiated breathdrinker flees to digest its meal (which usually takes several days) before setting out to hunt once again.

Gaze of Terror (Su): Anyone who meets the glowing red eyes of a breathdrinker must make a Will saving throw (DC 16) or become paralyzed in terror for 1d4 rounds. This gaze attack has a range of 30 feet.

Steal Breath (Su): The breathdrinker can attempt to steal the breath of a helpless victim in melee range. This is a full-round action for the breathdrinker. The victim of this attack must make a successful Fortitude saving throw (DC 16) each round as the breathdrinker tries to suck out the air in the victims lungs. Each round the saving throw is failed, the victim suffers 1d6 points of temporary Constitution damage; each point of Constitution lost heals the breathdrinker of 5 points of damage. Once the victim's Constitution reaches zero, he dies and the breathdrinker retreats to its lair to digest its meal.

Air Mastery (Ex): Airborne creatures suffer a -1 penalty to attack and damage rolls against a breathdrinker.

Elemental (Ex): The breathdrinker is immune to poison, sleep, paralysis, and stunning. It is not subject to critical hits and cannot be flanked. It has darkvision with a range of 60 feet.

Invisibility (Su): A breathdrinker can make itself invisible as a free action.

RUKARAZYLL

Medium Outsider (Earth, Evil)

Hit Dice:	12d8+48 (102 hp)
Initiative:	+8 (+8 Dex)
Speed:	70 ft., climb 50 ft.
AC:	24 (+8 Dex, +3 natural, +3 profane)
Attacks:	3 Tendrils +20 melee, Bite +10 melee; or spit ooze + 20 ranged
Damage:	Tendril 1d6-2, Bite 1d6-2 plus 2d4 acid
Face/Reach:	5 ft. by 5 ft./5 ft.
Special Attacks:	Spell-like abilities, spit ooze, fungus
Special Qualities:	Damage reduction 20/+2, SR 23, evasion, profane alacrity
Saves:	Fort +12, Ref +16, Will +11
Abilities:	Str 6, Dex 27, Con 18, Int 18, Wis 17, Cha 16
Skills:	Concentration +14, Balance +22, Bluff +18, Disguise +18, Escape Artist +16, Forgery +9, Hide +14, Intimidate +18, Knowledge (religion) +12, Search +9, Sense Motive +18, Spellcraft +12, Spot +8, Tumble +23
Feats:	Expertise, Improved Disarm, Improved Trip, Weapon Finesse (tendril)
Climate/Terrain:	Any
Organization:	Solitary or cell (2-12)
Challenge Rating:	14
Treasure:	Double standard
Alignment:	Always chaotic evil
Advancement Range:	13-24 HD (Large), 25-36 HD (Huge)

Rukarazylls are deceivers and tricksters. When conjured in the Prime Material Plane, they delight in masquerading as charismatic men or women. In such guises, they attempt to convince locals to establish cults dedicated to apparently benign (but altogether fabricated) minor deities.

Over time, the rukarazyll slowly perverts its followers to the worship of Ogremach, the elemental prince of evil earth creatures. When it doesn't have the time or resources to seed cults, the rukarazyll contents itself with selling cursed items it passes off as beneficial, posing as a priest and inflicting diseases on those seeking healing, and pursuing other underhanded and cruel tricks.

In its true form, a rukarazyll is only vaguely humanoid. Its body is a bulbous mass of seething fungoid matter, studded with eyes and gasping orifices that leak stinking, black drool. It has six long, hook-studded tendrils that extrude from various random points on the central body. Three of these tendrils serve as legs while the other three serve as hands. Extending from the top of the body is a long scaly tentacle atop which sits the creature's head. Its head resembles a ram's skull complete with horns. Great fangs stud its lipless mouth from which bubbling acidic froth constantly dribbles. The rukarazyll's natural voice is thick and gurgling, as if its throat were partially clogged with mud, but rukarazylls are good at disguising this sound when attempting to pass themselves off as humanoids. Writhing nests of pale fungal filaments fill their eyesockets; these filaments grow out of other random spots all over the thing's body.

COMBAT

The rukarazyll is physically weak, but it makes up for lack of strength with its blinding speed and accuracy. A rukarazyll enjoys melee combat and often forgoes its spell-like abilities if a chance to fight presents itself. In combat, it strikes with three of its tendrils and bites with its acidic jaws. It takes full advantage of its feats, using Expertise to full effect and using Improved Trip and Improved Disarm as opportunities arise. It relies on its Tumble skill to

avoid drawing attacks of opportunity as it weaves about. Combat with a rukarazyll is both disorienting and terrifying.

Spell-Like Abilities (Sp): At will—*alter self, blur, darkness, desecrate, detect good, detect magic, mirror image, cat's grace, telekinesis, entangle, plant growth, protection from good, undetectable alignment, snare,* and *teleport without error* (self plus 50 pounds of objects only); 3/day—*polymorph self, unhallow, unholy blight;* 1/day—*wall of thorns, command plants, heal.* These abilities are as the spells cast by a 12th-level sorcerer.

Spit Ooze (Su): Once every 10 minutes, the rukarazyll can expel a Medium-size gray ooze from its mouth at any one target as a grenade-like weapon with a 10-foot range increment. If the target is hit, the gray ooze can immediately attempt to use its improved grab ability and start constricting the victim on the following round. If the spat ooze misses, determine miss distance and direction normally. The ooze moves to attack normally the next round. Gray oozes created in this manner are short lived; after 2d4 rounds of life, such oozes die.

Fungus (Su): A living creature struck by a rukarazyll's melee attacks must make a Fortitude saving throw (DC 20) or become infested with the fecund fungus that grows on the creature's body. This fungus grows rapidly when introduced to living tissue. This growth causes no damage, but it feels quite unpleasant and infests a Medium-sized creature in 1d4 rounds. Each size category larger increases the growth time by 1d4 rounds; creatures smaller than Medium-size are infested in 1 round. Creatures can free themselves of the fungus before they are infested by being subject to 10 points of fire or cold damage, or a *remove disease* spell. Once infested, the fibrous white filaments begin to seethe and twist, actively trying to resist any actions the infested creature attempts. This incurs a -2 penalty to all attack rolls, Dexterity-based skill checks, and Reflex saving throws. In addition, the fungus continues to grow in the victim's body (albeit at a much slower rate), slowly eating away at his personality at the rate of one point of permanent Charisma drain per day. Once the victim's Charisma reaches zero, he dies and transforms into an immobile heap of fungus that lives for an additional 3d6 weeks before perishing. A *remove disease* spell destroyed the infestation, but not the Charisma drain.

It is possible to become infested by coming into contact with one of these transformed bodies; infestation can be resisted with a successful Fortitude saving throw (DC 16).

Evasion (Ex): A rukarazyll can avoid even magical and unusual attacks with great agility. If it makes a successful Reflex saving throw against an attack that normally deals half damage on a successful save, the rukarazyll instead takes no damage.

Profane Alacrity (Su): The rukarazyll is infused with an unholy energy that grants it amazing reflexes and speed. These unholy energies actively work to block and turn aside incoming attacks (granting a +3 profane bonus to the rukarazyll's Armor Class) and also allow the rukarazyll to take 10 on any Balance, Escape Artist, and Tumble checks in any circumstance. Once per hour, the rukarazyll can call upon these energies to gain a temporary boost to its movement, doubling its speed and profane bonus to Armor Class for 1 minute. After this minute, the rukarazyll's profane energies are depleted for 1 hour, during which time it does not receive the bonus to AC or the ability to take 10 in any circumstance.

FIRETONGUE FROG

Tiny Elemental (Fire, Evil)

Hit Dice:	1d8+3 (7 hp)
Initiative:	+3 (Dex)
Speed:	30 ft., fly 60 ft. (good)
AC:	15 (+2 size, +3 Dex)
Attacks:	Tongue +5 melee
Damage:	Tongue 2d6 fire damage
Face/Reach:	2 ft. by 2 ft./5 ft.
Special Attacks:	Ignite blood, lightburst
Special Qualities:	Damage reduction 15/+5, elemental, fire subtype, water barriers
Saves:	Fort +3, Ref +5, Will +0
Abilities:	Str 4, Dex 16, Con 16, Int 8, Wis 10, Cha 10
Skills:	Bluff +4, Listen +4, Move Silently +7, Spot +4
Climate/Terrain:	Underground and desert
Organization:	Solitary, Pair, or Swarm (3-12)
Challenge Rating:	4
Treasure:	None
Alignment:	Always neutral evil
Advancement Range:	2-3 HD (Tiny)

The firetongue frog is only about 2 feet long, but it can be quite dangerous and difficult to slay. The creature strongly resembles a large-eyed tree frog with fiery red skin and yellow eyes with white pupils. It flickers and glows from within, as if it had swallowed a red-hot coal. The creature's skeleton is perfectly visible as a darker red below its glistening skin. When it opens its mouth, tiny flames curl out.

Although native to the Elemental Plane of Fire, firetongue frogs are one of the few beings from that realm that can exist with relative ease elsewhere. In fact, they actually prefer to lair in areas inhabited by non-elemental creatures, since they prefer living creatures as prey. Firetongues have been known to ally with other creatures in exchange for regular offerings of helpless "food" to torment.

Firetongue frogs cannot enter water or any other non-flammable liquid. A body of water is an impassible barrier unless the firetongue frog can step or jump over it.

Firetongues speak Ignan and Common. A firetongue frog emits light equivalent to that of a torch.

COMBAT

Firetongues usually travel and hunt in small swarms, although it isn't unknown to encounter a lone firetongue. The firetongue frog understands that most creatures have a difficult time harming it, and it sometimes takes advantage of this fact in combat and mocks its enemies. At times, it spends several rounds of combat flying around and taunting its prey with insults and combat feints (using its Bluff skill, see page 64 of the *Player's Handbook*) before finally going in for the kill. A firetongue attacks with its tongue, a burning lash of fire that can reach targets within 5 feet.

Ignite Blood (Su): The flames that comprise the firetongue frog's burning tongue contain a magic venom that can ignite the blood of living creatures. A creature damaged by a firetongue frog's tongue attack must make a Fortitude saving throw (DC 13) or be subject to the venom. This causes a horrible burning sensation as the victim's blood quickly heats, causing an additional +1d6 points of fire damage per round for 1d4 rounds. Victims can make Fortitude saving throws (DC 13) every round; a successful save negates any additional damage. Magical healing of any sort halts this damage immediately. If a creature is killed by this damage, the body erupts into flame, causing 3d6 points of fire damage to all adjacent creatures. Undead, constructs, and other creatures without blood are immune to the firetongue frog's ignite blood ability.

Lightburst (Su): Once a minute, a firetongue frog can emit a blinding flash of light as a full-round action. Any creature within 5 feet of the frog at this time must make a Fortitude saving throw (DC 13) or be blinded for 3d6 rounds.

Elemental (Ex): The firetongue frog is immune to poison, sleep, paralysis, and stunning. It is not subject to critical hits and cannot be flanked. It has darkvision with a range of 60 feet.

Fire Subtype (Ex): Firetongue frogs are immune to fire. They suffer double damage from cold, except on a successful save.

ORLYTHYS

Large Outsider (Aquatic, Water, Evil)

Hit Dice:	6d8+18 (45 hp)
Initiative:	+2 (Dex)
Speed:	10 ft., swim 40 ft.
AC:	15 (+2 Dex, -1 Size, +4 natural)
Attacks:	2 claws +10 melee
Damage:	Claws 1d6+5
Face/Reach:	5 ft. by 5 ft./5 ft.
Special Attacks:	Spell-like abilities, dehydration ray, spawn water elemental, enslave elemental
Special Qualities:	Immune to bludgeoning weapons, fog cloud, darkvision 60 ft.
Saves:	Fort +8, Ref +7, Will +6
Abilities:	Str 20, Dex 14, Con 16, Int 12, Wis 12, Cha 16
Skills:	Hide +7, Knowledge (the Planes) +9, Listen +10, Move Silently +10, Spot +11, Search +6, Concentration +12
Feats:	Alertness, Spell Penetration
Climate/Terrain:	Temperate or warm swamp, any aquatic
Organization:	Solitary
Challenge Rating:	6
Treasure:	Standard
Alignment:	Always neutral evil
Advancement Range:	By character class

The dreaded orlythys is thought to hail from the Elemental Plane of Water. In truth, these cruel and sadistic creatures come from some unnamed and infinitely huge bogland on some dark plane in the Abyss. In this lightless, stinking realm, these monsters are the undisputed lords and rule vast empires of slaves kidnapped from other realms and forced to serve as laborers, food, or worse. The orlythys enjoys traveling to the Elemental Plane of Water to hunt and enslave water elementals.

An orlythys encountered on the Prime Material Plane is almost always an exile, often having fled its home plane to avoid persecution by its superiors for some transgression. A rare few actually prefer the limited boglands of the Prime Material Plane to the limitless fens of their home plane. In both cases, a Prime Material orlythys tries to establish a colony of water elemental slaves as quickly as possible before attempting to make contact with nearby intelligent creatures. Such contact almost always leads to open warfare, as the orlythys usually attempts to enslave or consume those it encounters during its wanderings.

An orlythys's body consists of a roughly egg-shaped mass of tendrils, tentacles, and sensory organs. It possesses two muscular humanoid arms with large webbed talons, and it can swim quite rapidly with its twin lobster-like tails. On land, an orlythys walks about using its two arms as legs.

The orlythys communicates telepathically. Although it possesses no mouth, it understands the Aquan language. Some understand Common as well.

COMBAT

An orlythys prefers to fight while submerged. On land, they can rest on their two tails to free their arms to slash at enemies. The orlythys usually tries to send any enslaved water elementals against enemies, allowing it to use its spell-like abilities or dehydration ray. A wounded orlythys often tries to bargain for its life by pledging its services. Adventurers would be wise to mistrust such offers, for an orlythys invariably turns on a captor at the first opportunity.

Spell-Like Abilities (Sp): At will—*create water, detect magic, faerie fire, cause fear, soften earth and stone, grease;* 3/day—*dispel magic, gaseous form, control water, solid fog, fear,* 1/day—*summon nature's ally V* (elementals only), *transmute rock to mud, horrid wilting.* These abilities are as the spells cast by a 6th-level sorcerer (save DC 13 + spell level).

Dehydration Ray (Su): Once every 1d6 rounds, the orlythys can shoot a pale blue beam at any living creature within 30 feet. This is a move-equivalent action and requires a successful ranged touch attack. A victim hit by the ray must make a Fortitude save (DC 16) or take 1d6 points of temporary Constitution damage as water is drawn out of the victim and transmitted along the beam into the orlythys's body where it is stored in a specialized stomach-like organ called an *ilisac.* An orlythys can only hold up to 10 points of drained Constitution in this manner at a time.

Spawn Water Elemental (Su): An orlythys that has 10 points of Constitution stored in its ilisac can spawn a Medium-size water elemental as a full-round action. The spawned water elemental is automatically enslaved by its creator, and this counts against the three times per day limit that an orlythys can enslave an elemental (see Enslave Elemental, below). The spawned elemental attacks on the next initiative of the orlythys. Spawning an elemental in this manner completely depletes the stored Constitution points held in the orlythys's ilisac.

Enslave Elemental (Su): Three times a day, an orlythys can attempt to enslave any elemental within 30 feet. The target must succeed at a Will saving throw (DC 16), or be affected as though by a *dominate monster* spell cast by a 20th-level sorcerer.

Fog Cloud (Su): Once every 10 minutes, the orlythys can emit dense clouds of moist fog as a free action. This fog surrounds the creature entirely, affording it half concealment (20% miss chance) and fire resistance 5. This fog cloud persists for 1d10 rounds before dissipating. A moderate wind (11+ mph) disperses the fog in 4 rounds; a strong wind (21+ mph) disperses the fog in 1 round.

Orlythys Characters: An orlythys's favored class is druid; most orlythys leaders are druids or druid/fighters. Wizards, sorcerers, fighters, and rangers are also common among their kind; they do not have clerics, as they look to their druidic leaders for spiritual guidance.

TRALUSK

Large Aberration (Earth)

Hit Dice:	9d8+36 (76 hp)
Initiative:	+0
Speed:	30 ft., climb 30 ft.
AC:	21 (-1 size, +12 natural)
Attacks:	Bite +10 melee, 6 claws +8 melee plus poison
Damage:	Bite 2d6+7, Claw 1d6+2
Face/Reach:	5 ft. by 10 ft./5 ft.
Special Attacks:	Poison, shattering shriek, control stone
Special Qualities:	Damage reduction 5/—, darkvision 120 ft., *meld into stone*
Saves:	Fort +7, Ref +3, Will +6
Abilities:	Str 20, Dex 10, Con 18, Int 16, Wis 10, Cha 18
Skills:	Climb +23, Intuit Direction +9, Listen +11, Perform (tralusk song) +18
Feats:	Multiattack, Power Attack, Run, Skill Focus (perform)
Climate/Terrain:	Any underground (Underdark)
Organization:	Solitary
Challenge Rating:	7
Treasure:	Standard
Alignment:	Usually neutral evil
Advancement Range:	10-24 HD (Huge), 25-27 HD (Gargantuan)

The tralusk is a truly horrible and bizarre-looking creature. The closest parallel in the natural world is a scorpion, although even then the resemblance is only superficial. The body of a tralusk is wide but flat and plated with thick scales of obsidian. It moves about with the aid of dozens of long spidery legs that end in crystal claws that can pierce stone. Between each leg is a blue crystalline eye on a short reticulated stalk. The front of the creature is a nest of six long claws mounted on thick segmented arms. The creature's "tail" is in fact a long stalk of flexible black stone that ends in a huge lamprey-like mouth surrounded by five hooked starfish-like arms.

The tralusk is closely connected with the element of earth—so closely, in fact, that many adventurers and explorers are quick to classify it as an elemental. In truth, these creatures are natives to the Prime Material Plane. They might once have been natives of the Elemental Plane of Earth, but if they were, they have long since adapted to life here, where they are challenged by few other creatures.

Despite their decidedly alien appearance, the tralusk is quite intelligent. They are great appreciators of music, and an accomplished bard can sometimes placate an angry tralusk with a particularly impressive song. Placating a tralusk in this manner generally requires the bard to make a Perform check opposed by the tralusk's own Perform check. Tralusk songs are eerie and haunting, and they are often mistaken for wind blowing over hollows in desolate badlands. Through these songs, tralusks communicate with one another. Although they can understand Common, they lack the organs to mimic human speech.

Their love of beautiful music is matched only by their cruelty. A tralusk is fond of imprisoning intelligent creatures almost completely in stone, leaving only the head exposed so the victim can listen to the tralusk's songs. Tralusk songs (to those who can understand the language) are invariably about acts of violence and rage against other creatures. Tralusks have been known to raid towns simply to kidnap audience members for their lair. Invariably, these "audiences" are poisoned and eaten.

Tralusks subsist on fossilized organic matter. While they can consume natural fossils, they usually gain nutrition by poisoning living creatures with their claws.

COMBAT

A tralusk invariably begins singing during combat. While this is unsettling to most listeners, it does not otherwise affect the fight. Tralusks are fond of grandiose moves in combat and almost always uses the Power Attack feat to make their attacks more impressive and painful.

Poison (Su): A tralusk's claws drip a thick fluid that resembles mud. This fluid is in fact a potent poison. Any creature struck by a tralusk's claw must make a Fortitude saving throw (DC 18) or take 1 point of permanent Dexterity drain as their body slowly begins to stiffen. Anyone drained to 0 Dexterity in this manner becomes completely fossilized. A *stone to flesh* spell can restore the victim.

Shattering Shriek (Su): Once every 5 rounds, a tralusk can emit an ear-piercing shriek as an attack. This shriek creates a beam of sonic energy that the creature can direct at any single target within 60 feet; the tralusk must hit with a ranged touch attack, substituting a perform check for the attack roll. If successful, the victim suffers 12d6 points of subdual damage and must make a Fortitude saving throw (DC 18) or be stunned for 1d6 rounds.

Alternatively, the tralusk can attempt to shatter an object with this shriek. It automatically hits, but it must make a Perform check (DC equals the object's Break DC as listed on page 136 of the *Player's Handbook*).

Control Stone (Su): Once a day, the tralusk can control stone by intoning a low rumbling song that almost sounds like an earthquake. This is a full-round action for the tralusk. The tralusk must make a Perform check; the magnitude of control depends on the result. The tralusk can choose to duplicate any spell effect on the table below depending on the result of its Perform check as if cast by a 9th-level sorcerer.

Spell Effect	Perform check
Soften earth and stone	20
Stone shape	23
Spike stones	26
Transmute rock to mud	28
Transmute mud to rock	28
Wall of stone	30
Repel metal or stone	33
Earthquake	35

Meld Into Stone (Sp): Three times a day a tralusk can *meld into stone* as the spell cast by a 9th-level sorcerer.

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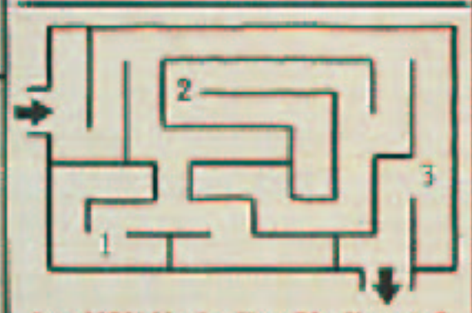

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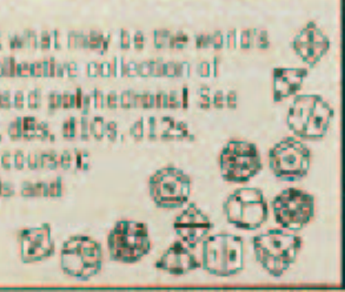

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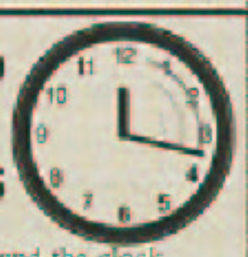

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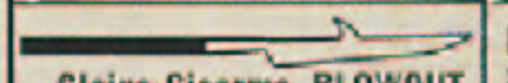

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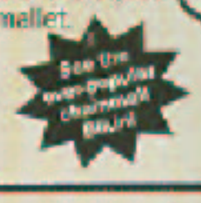

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CITIES of the AGES

BY KENNETH HITE · ILLUSTRATED BY TED BEARGEON

PRAGUE

Though the latitude's rather uncertain,
And the longitude likewise is vague,
Still the people I pity who know not the City,
The beautiful city of Prague.

—William Prowse, *The City of Prague*

Even 350 years before Franz Kafka wrote his novels of paranoia, Prague was a city of mystery, of ominous atmosphere, of conspiracies and fog. At the end of the sixteenth century, this "city of a hundred spires" was the crowded center of all things magical and mysterious in Europe. Prague has room for a mad emperor, corrupt alchemists, visionary painters, a fearsome Golem, sorcerous dwarves, and some say Satan himself—surely it can hold your adventurers as well.

HISTORY

How Prague came to be depends on whom you ask. If you ask the Czech woodcutters and laborers, it was built on the site where the ancient prophetess Lubossa met the shepherd-king Premysl cutting a threshold for a new house. If you ask the German nobles and burghers, Prague was one of the many fortresses of the son of Hercules, King Boher, who gave his name not only to Bohemia but also Bavaria. If you ask the Jewish merchants and craftsmen, refugee Jews fleeing Rome after the destruction of the Temple founded Prague.

Under Bohemia's turbulent rulers, Prague took on its character of conspiracy and eccentricity—and of religious turmoil. In 935, "good king Wenceslas" (later St. Wenceslas) was murdered by his brother Boleslav. Later, bad king Wenceslaus IV tortured St. John Nepomuk of the Miraculous Tongue and threw him off the Charles Bridge in 1393. Shortly thereafter, the Hussite War broke out over the reforms of Bohemian preacher Jan Huss, and even after the moderate Hussite "Utraquists" allied themselves to the Catholics in 1434, religious revolts stirred the city. Finally, in 1547, the Emperor Ferdinand I Hapsburg burned much of Prague to the ground and enforced religious peace and Catholic supremacy. Even under the more tolerant (although considerably less efficient) Rudolf II, the towns of Prague have not regained their ancient rights and charters, and the Hapsburg troops in the city regard its people (with justifiable suspicion) as a den of crazy heretics.

I love wondrous Prague, which is as unique and enchanting as its melancholy king. Believe me, this gloomy city plants a glow of madness in the brain of those who make it their own. . . . So much energy, so much magnetism of occult forces, is concentrated there that experiments which fail elsewhere will succeed there.

—Jiri Karasek, *Král Rudolf*

Prague's 60,000 people live packed into a little more than one and a half square miles divided into four towns and the Hradcany, the imperial district. The Hradcany (or Radschin, in German) sits at the top of a high crag overlooking the Vltava (or Moldau, in German) River. The centerpieces of the Hradcany are the imperial palace and the Cathedral of St. Vitus. North of the castle proper sit small houses belonging to court figures, or rented from court figures at exorbitant rates by those who wish to remain near the Emperor for whatever reason. The fact that the Hradcany, as imperial property, is not subject to the same laws as the rest of Bohemia also makes it attractive to entrepreneurs.

Below the Hradcany, down a narrow set of stairs, lies the Little, or Lesser, Town. Here the artisans, printers, bookbinders, and courtiers who cannot afford richer quarters dwell, especially the stonemasons, bricklayers, and artists of Italian Lane. This street zigzags through the Maltese Square (where the Knights of Malta have their commandery) and across the "Devil's Stream" onto the pottery-works and millraces on Kampa Island. North of Italian Lane is Bridge Street, which leads to the grand Charles Bridge across the Vltava, and thence to the Old Town, where it becomes Charles Street. The Old Town holds the rich burghers and townsmen, both Czech and German. The bakers'

LOCAL HEROES All characters presented as of 1599. Character levels are suggestions, and you should change them to suit your campaign.

Tycho Brahe (born 1546)
8th-level Expert

The most brilliant naked-eye astronomer in Europe, the court astrologer to Emperor Rudolf is large in body, genius, and appetites. He is a famous trencherman and liable to fly into sudden tempers—but his observations and his sophisticated equipment make him the best-informed man in the world about the workings of the heavens.

Edward Kelley (born 1555)
3nd-level Rogue/4th-level Sorcerer

Edward Kelley became a scryer in the service of the great wizard John Dee (see London, in *DRAGON* #284) and stayed in Prague after Dee left in 1587. Now officially an alchemist, "der Engelender" walks a fine line between Imperial favor (Rudolf knighted him in 1589) and enmity (he has been in and out of the White Tower for the last six years).

Johannes Kepler (born 1571)
2nd-level Cleric/2nd-level Expert/
1st-level Wizard

Tycho's protégé and rival, and Rudolf's court mathematician, this Lutheran minister from Salzburg has the makings of a brilliant astronomer. However, his dabblings in astrology and Pythagorean magic unnerve some at court.

Philipp Lang z Langenfelsu
(born 1560?)
10th-level Rogue

The Emperor trusts his major-domo because Lang's low birth prevents him from joining any of the aristocratic factions at court. Undaunted by social ostracism, Lang runs a ring of highwaymen in the countryside, sells access to Rudolf for bribes and favors, and steals valuable treasures from the Imperial galleries.

DWARVES IN PRAGUE

In addition to artists, rogues, mercenaries, and wizards, Emperor Rudolf has attracted hundreds of dwarves (dwarves, gnomes, and halflings) to his court. They come mostly as performers, but some also design the fascinating magical artifacts stored in Rudolf's fabled Chamber of Wonders, hidden away in the maze of the Palace where only he can find it. The spies in Prague all seem to have dwarven assistants who can hide under conference tables or sneak through the palace sewers to steal manuscripts. Many of Prague's notables also have dwarves in their service; Tycho Brahe has a dwarven servant named Jeppe, and the prominent Jewish moneylender and philanthropist Mordecai Maisl, mayor of the Jewish Quarter, remains wealthy thanks to the efforts (and the magic) of two dwarves. Prague's rush of miners, alchemists, and jewelers has also no doubt attracted the attention of Europe's premier magical craftsmen.

way, Celetná Street, runs from the Old Town Square (home of the famous clock) to the Old Town Gate on the city's east wall. By day a bustling thoroughfare, by night Celetná Street hosts many of the city's ghosts, most notably a butcher with a fiery axe and a phantom prostitute. South of Celetná Street, Prague's University, the Carolinium (named, like the Bridge, for the beloved Emperor Charles IV) and its students dominate the eastern portion of Old Town.

North of the Old Town, the Jewish Quarter crams thousands of families into a narrow, walled ghetto between Old Town Square and the curve of the Vltava. In addition to numerous synagogues and kosher butchers, many of the city's Christian criminals—especially brothels, gaming-houses, and illicit taverns—do business in the unpoliced Ghetto. On the other side of the Old Town from the Jewish Quarter, New Town sprawls away to the south. Charles IV founded New Town in 1348 as the market district, and it is still occupied by tradesmen such as blacksmiths, wheelwrights, and brewers. The Hay Market on the northeast side, the Cattle Market on the south side, and the Horse Market between them define the local geography even more than do the parish churches. Fancier shops, Italian luxuries merchants, and counting-houses crowd into the Golden Cross district, where the Horse Market abuts the Prince's Street along the south edge of the Old Town. Along the river are the docks, where raftsmen, fishermen, loggers, and tanners work and live among enormous piles of raw timber. Throughout New Town, many gardens and vineyards provide both food and calm to the hardworking inhabitants.

ADVENTURE IDEAS

Prague was always a city of adventurers . . . and for centuries it was a cove for pitiless adventurers. They came in droves from the four corners of the earth to plunder, make merry, and lord it over the natives.

—Milos Marten, *Nad Mestem*

Any adventurer, it seems, can get the ear of the emperor with a bribe in the right place and a good enough story. Getting the gold for the bribe—and knowing whom to suborn with it—might be a story in itself, in fact. Here are a few story hooks for adventuring in haunted Prague:

• Ambassadors and other dignitaries and nobles awaiting an audience with Emperor Rudolf remain at the mercy of his melancholic mood swings. Even knowing whom to bribe can get you only so far; everyone who is anyone at court winds up waiting for the Emperor in the high, vaulted Vladislav Hall in the imperial palace. In this bustling gallery, deals of all kinds are forged and broken—alchemists find patrons, spies find secrets, and wandering adventurers might find jobs. A group of characters new to Prague can begin in Vladislav Hall. A party of experienced PCs should drop in here and see if anyone's hiring.

• Word whips through Prague's underworld—Faust is back! Or, more correctly, his ghost is back from Hell. Everyone from bishops to sorcerers wants to know what his plans are and what he's learned—the PCs might be just the sort to nose around the cemeteries looking for spectral gossip and the ghost of Europe's greatest necromancer.

• Edward Kelley sold the Emperor a coded Manuscript written in an unknown language—it might contain wizardly secrets, the lore of the angels, or heretical blasphemies. The Manuscript remains immured in Rudolf's hidden Chamber of Wonders somewhere in the Palace, but spies and scholars have smuggled partial copies out. Sages, heretical cults, and magicians alike will pay good money for the first complete, decoded reconstruction. To assemble it, the PCs might have to break into every library in Prague from the enormous Strahov monastery on the west edge of the Hradcany to Rabbi Loew's attic stuffed with Syriac texts. The PCs will have to dodge not only the Prague thieves and Lang's robber bands but also the Church's inquisitors—and the Rabbi's Golem.

• During the Hussite Wars two centuries ago, the blind genius Zizka built War Machines—powerful siege engines (even cannons) mounted on armored carts. Lang's bandits, and even Rosswurm's cavalry, have seen a War Machine rolling through the royal hunting grounds on White Mountain west of the city. Is this infernal device built by one of the Emperor's mad geniuses? Is it the first scout of an army of Hussite ghosts, or of kobold miners planning a revolt? Could it be where the pieces of clockwork machinery Lang steals from the Chamber of Wonders and sells to unknown parties wind up?

Rabbi Yehudah Loew ben Bezalel (born 1520)
16th-level Cleric
The wisest rabbi in Europe, Rabbi Loew (known as "the Maharal") is the leader and protector of Prague's Jewish Quarter. His learning and magical powers are prodigious, and his creation, the mighty Golem, wreaks havoc on any who would harm the Jews of the city.

Baron Hermann Christian von Rosswurm (born 1565)
7th-level Fighter/2nd-level Rogue
The Marshal-General of the Emperor's armies in the war against the Turks, Baron von Rosswurm has an eye for the ladies and a habit of getting into duels. This makes him a questionable figure at court, and his expensive tastes lead him into shady deals with alchemists and spies. However, his loyalty to the Emperor is genuine.

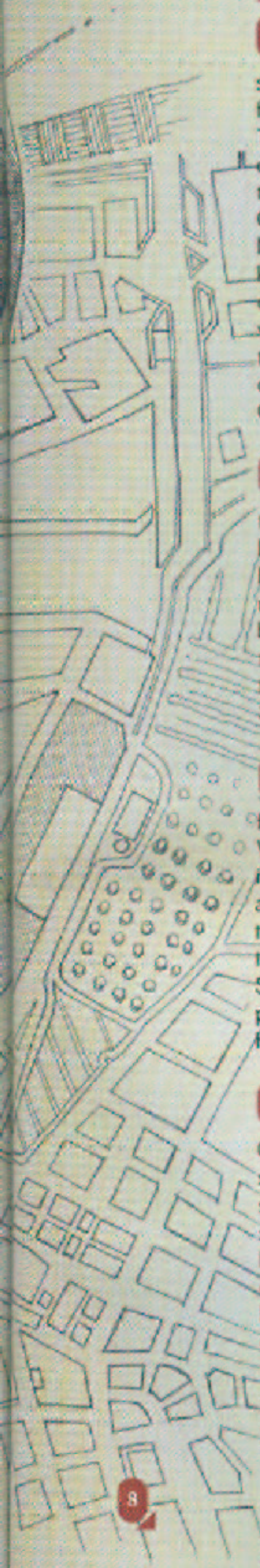
Rudolf II, King of Bohemia and Holy Roman Emperor (born 1552)
9th-level Aristocrat/2nd-level Cleric/3rd-level Wizard
Melancholic, suspicious, and quite possibly mad, Rudolf has turned Prague into an alchemists' paradise since his coronation in 1576. His tolerance of Jews and Protestants and his experiments in darkened magical laboratories have led some to suspect that he is possessed by a demon.

Zuckerbastl (born 1570?)
4th-level Rogue
A rapidly-rising figure in the well-organized Prague thieves' guild, Zuckerbastl (or "Sugar-Cake" from his well-known sweet tooth) already runs the rich Hradcany and Little Town districts. He's on track to be the King of Thieves in Prague by the time he's 40, although his rival Lang might have something to say about that.

OLD TOWN HALL CLOCK

CHURCH of TYN

RUDOLPH II



LOCATIONS

1 Charles Square: The great Cattle Market in this New Town square also contains many other stalls and shops along its fringes selling everything from coal to alchemical medicines to pickled herring. The Slavonic Monastery on the square's southwest corner currently holds a dissident Hussite order; on the north end, the first Hussite rebels threw the Catholic town council out of the windows of the New Town Hall in 1419 and killed them in the marketplace below. Their ghosts still haunt the Hussite chapel in the Square's center, and beneath it stories whisper of miles of crypts, passageways, and torture chambers running all the way to the Monastery of the Knights of the Cross near the bridge on Charles Street in Old Town.

2 Faust House: One of the most unsavory locations in Prague, this small three-story house on the south side of Charles Square belongs to Edward Kelley. Here, when he is not imprisoned by the Emperor, he conducts his alchemical (and necromantic, whisper the neighbors) researches. The diabolist Faust reputedly stayed here in the early 1500s, and the strong smell of sulfur blowing from the house at dark hours supposedly emanates from Satan, who drops in on his friend from time to time.

3 Goldmaker's Street: This narrow, short lane runs between the two prison towers of Hradcany, the Dalibor Tower on the east and the White Tower on the west. Tiny, cramped houses jam its length, home to Rudolf's guardsmen and to the alchemists and goldsmiths from which the street takes it name. Many of the alchemists also dwell in the Vikarska Street around St. George's, between St. Vitus's and the Gunsmith Tower. Should they prove to be frauds, they can be easily slung into the Hradcany's convenient prisons.

4 Petrin: On the southwest border of the Lesser Town, Petrin Hill rises 960 feet above the city. Once a pagan temple for human sacrifices to the storm god Petrunas, the Church of St. Lawrence sits on the hill's east slope. Around the hill to the south and west runs the Hunger Wall, built in 1360 by Charles IV to provide employment for the poor during a terrible famine. The Strahov Monastery links the Hunger Wall to the Hradcany fortifications on the north. Within the enclosure, forests, vineyards, and orchards run from the Hunger Wall around the summer palaces of the rich merchants and nobles, and all the way up to the Lesser Town's shops.

5 Charles Bridge: The fortified commandery of the Knights of Malta guards the Judith Tower on the west (Lesser Town) end of Peter Parler's masterpiece, the only bridge across the Vltava in the city. It runs 1,700 feet over fifteen arches to the Old Town Bridge Tower, also designed by Parler in 1391; four carriages can cross it abreast. On the roof over the tower's second floor, Parler inscribed Latin palindromes to entrap demons. Against more mortal foes, the Knights of the Cross commandery holds the east end.

6 Church of Tyn: This magnificent Gothic structure on the east side of Old Town Square is the central church of the Hussites of Prague. The Utraquist symbol, a golden chalice, gleams from the façade above the main doors. Like any church, it also serves as a meeting place, hiring hall, and market. Unlike the Cathedral of St. Vitus in the Hradcany, it is not haunted.

7 Old Town Hall Clock: After Master Clockmaker Hanus of Ruze built this magnificent timepiece in 1490, the Old Town councilors blinded him so that he could not build a finer one for any other city. In a rage, he climbed the tower, stopped the clock, and swore that the next time its hands stopped, the world would end. It was not until 1572 that the city dared to restart it, after twenty years of repairs by the engineer Jan Taborsky. Its many hands point to three kinds of time (Roman, Old Bohemian, and Babylonian), depict the journey of the sun and moon around the earth, and indicate the motion of both bodies through the twelve signs of the zodiac. A revolving dial below the clock tells the day and month. Many ornate figures adorn the clock, which cunningly move of themselves every hour. At first, Death pulls on a metal chain and inverts his hourglass. Two windows then open, and the Twelve Apostles (with Paul in place of Judas) emerge led by St. Peter, moving along their track. At the end of this procession, a cock crows and the clock chimes the hour. Looking on, a Turk shakes his head and leers while Greed weighs his moneybag and Vanity admires himself in the mirror.

8 Sedlec Ossuary: A little over forty miles east of Prague is the silver-mining town of Kutna Hora. Its first glory came in the late 1200s, and with the discovery of new mining and smelting techniques, the boom times are back. Near Kutna Hora is the little Cistercian church of Sedlec. Its abbot, Brother Heinrich, returned from pilgrimage to Jerusalem in 1278 with a large pot of "Holy Soil" supposedly from Golgotha, the hill of Christ's crucifixion, which he spread over the Sedlec cemetery. To be buried in the "holy soil of Sedlec" guaranteed immediare admission to Heaven—by 1318 over 30,000 bodies lay beneath the sacred ground. In 1511, to make room for an influx of new customers as Kutna Hora again gained population, the monks of Sedlec exhumed the thousands of bodies and placed the bones in an ossuary in All Saints' Chapel. This 15th-century structure now advertises its macabre role with skull and crossbones ornaments atop the steeples rather than conventional crosses.

FAITHS OF FAERÛN

SILVERSTAR

BY JULIA MARTIN & ERIC HADDOCK • ILLUSTRATED BY MATT WILSON

Some of the old specialty priests are poorly translated with just multiclassing and feat choice. Some of them were such a grab bag of capabilities that it is difficult to see their core theme. Want to have some of those eclectic abilities and refocus your cleric on the driving themes of his deity? Then you probably want to enter into a prestige class. Here is one to take the place of Selûne's specialty priests, the silverstars.

SELÛNE: SILVERSTARS

Silverstars are dedicated advocates of freedom and tolerance, wanderers on the path of truth, and absolute foes of Shar. They seek to build harmony among lycanthropes and nonshapechangers, and they protect the weak and the oppressed everywhere. They cannot abide slavery, and they hate most undead. They rarely settle in one place for long, instead moving along when seized by wanderlust or enticed by a new cause or mission. Sometimes they receive visions and are seen as somewhat "touched" with prophecy by their closeness to the Moonmaiden. They deal with lunar energies and phenomena and are, to a limited degree, able to wield the power of the moon, bringing its fierce, pure white light to Toril to advance the goddess's wishes.

Clerics most often become silverstars; rangers are a less common choice. Selûne demands an individualistic outlook on life that is incompatible with the lawful nature of paladins and monks, and her passionately good and chaotic nature leaves little room for the balance a druid requires.

SILVERSTAR — HIT DIE: D8

Level	Attack Bonus	Fort. Save	Ref. Save	Will Save	Special	Spellcasting
1st	+0	+2	+0	+2	Moon spells	+1 level of existing class
2nd	+1	+2	+0	+2	Lunar sight	+1 level of existing class
3rd	+2	+3	+1	+3	Moon's hand +1	+1 level of existing class
4th	+3	+4	+1	+4	Tears of Selûne 1/day	+1 level of existing class
5th	+3	+4	+1	+4	Prophet's sight 1/day	+1 level of existing class
6th	+4	+5	+2	+5	Selûnite lycanthrope	+1 level of existing class
7th	+5	+5	+2	+5	Moonshield	+1 level of existing class
8th	+6	+6	+2	+6	Prophet's sight 2/day	+1 level of existing class
9th	+6	+6	+3	+6	*Tears of Selûne* 2/day, moon's hand +2	+1 level of existing class
10th	+7	+7	+3	+7	*Moonfire*	+1 level of existing class

CLASS REQUIREMENTS

To qualify to become a silverstar, a character must fulfill all the following criteria:

Patron Deity: Selûne
Alignment: Chaotic Good
Base Attack Bonus: +4
Spellcasting: Ability to cast 2nd-level divine spells. Clerics who wish to become silverstars must have access to the Moon domain.
Intuit Direction: 2 ranks
Sense Motive: 2 ranks
Feats: Blind-Fight, Dodge, Mobility, Spring Attack

CLASS SKILLS

Skill Points at Each Level: 2 + Int modifier

The silverstar's class skills (organized by key ability) are:

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
		Concentration	Craft Knowledge (arcana) Knowledge (geography) Knowledge (local) Knowledge (nature) Knowledge (the planes) Knowledge (religion) Scry Spellcraft	Heal Intuit Direction Profession Sense Motive Wilderness Lore	Diplomacy

Class Features

All of the following are features of the silverstar prestige class.

Weapon and Armor Proficiency: Silverstars are proficient with all simple weapons, all types of armor, and with shields. Selûne's favored weapon is the heavy mace, which silverstars refer to as the moon's hand.

Spellcasting: A silverstar continues training in magic. Thus, when a new silverstar level is gained, the character gains new spells per day as if she had also gained a level in a divine spellcasting class she belonged to before she added the prestige class. She does not, however, gain any other benefit a character of that class would have gained (improved chance of controlling or rebuking undead, additional favored enemies, and so on). This essentially means that she adds the level of silverstar to the level of some other spellcasting class the character has, then determines spells per day and caster level accordingly.

Moon Spells: A silverstar can pray for and receive any Moon domain spell as if it were on her divine spell list. The spell uses a spell slot of a level equal to its level in the Moon domain list. For instance, a cleric/silverstar could pray for *moonblade* as a 3rd-level cleric spell, and a ranger/silverstar could pray for *moonbeam* as a 2nd-level ranger spell.

Lunar Sight: Silverstars have low-light vision. This is an extraordinary ability.

Moon's Hand: When a silverstar wields a heavy mace, she negates damage reduction in creatures she attacks as if it were a +2 weapon. At 9th level, it negates damage reduction as if her heavy mace were a +3 weapon. If the mace's bonus is greater than the effect of this class ability, use the mace's bonus to determine whether damage reduction is negated.

Tears of Selûne: A silverstar can project small balls of luminescent lunar energy from her eyes as a *dancing lights* spell (torches or will-o'-wisps only) cast by a wizard of her level. At 9th level, this ability can be used twice per day. Activating this ability is a standard action. This is a spell-like ability.

Prophet's Sight: A silverstar is able to see as if under the effect of a *true seeing* spell cast by a cleric of her level. At 8th level, this ability can be used twice per day. Activating this ability is a standard action. This is a supernatural ability.

Selûnite Lycanthrope: Silverstars who contract any form of lycanthropy are treated as natural lycanthropes. Their type becomes shapechanger, and they can select the Improved Control Shape feat (see the *Monster Manual*, page 218) or the Scent ability as a feat (see the *Monster Manual*, page 10) at any point that they can select a new feat. Silverstars do not change alignment due to contracting lycanthropy and are aware of their actions while in animal or hybrid form.

Moonshield: The silverstar gains a +1 bonus to saves against Enchantment, Illusion, and Necromancy spells and effects, and spells and effects with the Darkness descriptor. This is a supernatural ability.

Moonfire: The silverstar can cast *moonfire* once a day as a 17th-level cleric. Activating this spell-like ability is a standard action.

Lost places, familiar haunts, and strange sites in the lands of Faerûn.

ELMINSTER'S GUIDE TO THE REALMS

The SHRINE of SWORDS

A single chamber enclosed in metal, in a welded cage shaped like a gigantic warrior's gauntlet of interwoven spears and bars overlaid with rusting shields. The thumb and forefinger frame the oval entry arch. Upperworks are watertight, but there are chinks in side-walls; smooth, continuous flagstone floor.

Many hooks for the leaving of offerings (weapons); 2-foot-long lengths of wire provided for hanging weapons not intended for suspension (to take away wire without paying with a weapon is a sin punishable by blood loss at the hands of the faithful of the wargod).

Interwoven swords (not welded together) forced into a latticework support for a surface of overlapping shields. Enspelled to emit *continual flame* (white; the "Light of the Wargod's Regard").

Flagstone trapdoor, 20-foot shaft (wooden pole-and-crosspiece ladder) to chambers below. Guardian swords await non-faithful intruders partway down the shaft.

BY ED GREENWOOD · ILLUSTRATED BY DAVID DAY

The eastern side of the High Road south of Neverwinter is lined by many wooded dells. Some of them are sinkholes, some abandoned quarries, and some of unknown origin—but all are ideal camping-places in harsh weather. One that has felt far fewer firewood-seeking axes than most has been made into a wayside shrine to Tempus.

Visitors will see a lone dome-like chamber made of used armor and weaponry welded together in the shape of a gigantic gauntlet or armored hand. The structure encloses a glowing altar fashioned of shields, which is supported by a network of interlaced swords upon a flagstone floor. The place provides spare accommodations, but it is available for a day and night to all who make offerings of weapons, and it often provides vital protection against pursuing brigands or wolves, for no one can draw blood within the sanctified area of the shrine, save in a ritual dedicated to Tempus, without awakening the seven animated blades that guard the shrine. Any priest of Tempus within sight of the shrine can mentally command the blades to strike in accordance with his or her will (as a free action, but the character can only select targets for the blades, not control them otherwise).

Intruders who find the concealed flagstone trapdoor and try to descend the shaft beneath it into the rooms reserved for clergy of Tempus and their guests also face attack by the blades. If they try to take anything from the underground armory without uttering the proper pass-phrase, they'll suffer attack from the helmed horror waiting there. Only a priest of Tempus can call off these guardians once they are activated, but the horrors do not pursue targets outside the temple's holy ground.

The Shrine of Swords was established some twenty summers ago by several wandering priests of the Wargod, and it has been expanded since then and is often both restocked with weapons and stripped of offerings by needy clergy.

Without revealing rituals to unbelievers, it can be said that the shrine exists as a stopover place for all faithful of Tempus, and its altar allows for the full range of normal—that is, non-battlefield and non-monsterslaying—devotions such as vigils, weapon consecrations, prayers for guidance, "honor woundings," and daily offerings and reverences.

A variable array of well-oiled, sharp weapons available to all faithful of Tempus. Some unusual weapons (such as caltrops and lengths of spiked chain) can be found here, but except in times of war or orc horde, there will always be at least:

- 20 halberds
- 20 glaives
- 10 battleaxes
- 10 greataxes
- 10 heavy maces
- 10 morning stars
- 40 daggers
- 20 longswords
- 10 greatswords
- 20 pairs of spiked gauntlets

Grouped by type, always including weapons suitable for users of varying sizes and strengths. In keeping with the faith of Tempus, ranged weapons will be rare or absent.

Shallow well with draw-bucket, guarded by a helmed horror floating above it that attacks those who seek to remove items from the armory without speaking the proper pass-phrases. It has no crossbow, but it does have a greatsword. The helmed horror gives its greatsword the power of wounding.

THE GUARDIAN BLADES

The seven silently hovering longswords that defend the shrine customarily hang vertically, point-down (except for the two that guard the shaft to the Rooms of Refuge). These guardian blades are Small animated objects (see the animated object entry in the *Monster Manual*) with the following non-standard characteristics: HD 4d10 (22 hp); Init +2 (Dex); Spd Fly 60 ft. (perfect); AC 15; Atk +2 melee; Dmg 1d8; SQ SR 20 (spells cast by clerics of Tempus affect the swords normally); SV Fort +1, Ref +3, Will -4.

PASS-PHRASES

The underground areas are reserved for the use of clerics of Tempus and those who accompany them, and the guardians are governed by the following pass-phrases that must be uttered while touching either a metal weapon or the buckle or fastening of a piece of armor. Priests of Tempus and those in physical contact with them need not use the pass-phrases.

- The password to pass the blades in the shaft when going down is, "Bright blades forfend." Upward travel is harmless unless the helmed horror is active, whereupon this pass-phrase must be used to avoid attack.

- To open the armory door from the well chamber side without activating the helmed horror one must say, "For the sharpest need."

- Any weapon taken from the armory past the helmed horror will awaken it unless the words "Tempus arms me true" are spoken.

The following phrases work only if uttered by clergy of Tempus:

- To halt any guardian: "Mercy behind the blade."

- To return any guardian to its former position (after halting it; this phrase has no effect on an active guardian): "Vigilance before all."

THE WILL OF THE WARGOD

Some powers of the shrine are extended to non-believers only if they make an offering of either a weapon or blood shed in battle (usually a vial of such blood, but bloodstains are acceptable if the garment is left on the altar, whereupon it, like a weapon offering, will silently fade away before the power takes effect). These powers come without price to the faithful of Tempus.

- The faithful of Tempus or a person who made an offering gains the effect of a *ring of warmth* throughout the sanctified area (includes underground areas).

- A weapon touched to the altar by a creature who wills it not to be given as an offering but rather to know more about it, will emit visions—scenes that appear above the altar, and remain frozen there, in three dimensions, for some minutes—first of its most recent use to draw blood, and then one of its most important or bloody uses.

  If the weapon has an alignment, sentience, inherent magic, or temporary enchantments, all of these things will be made known to the being holding the weapon. The Shrine also reveals if such weapon properties have recently changed (for example, if a permanent or temporary enchantment have recently been applied).

- A poisoned weapon will be purged of such taints instantly upon contact with the altar (this power causes the altar to emit a deep, bell-like tone).

POWERS of the HOLY GROUND

Within the sanctified area of the shrine, where the will of Tempus is strong, certain properties pertain. Some of these are secrets of the faith, but others have become known over the years, including:

- wounds heal (naturally) at double the normal rate
- all healing magic restores twice the usual hit point total when applied to wounds made by manufactured weapons (not claws, fangs, or other such natural weaponry)
- weapons make no sound when struck or striking objects
- no weapon can be broken
- enchanted armor and weapons can be mended with a good chance (governed by the will of Tempus on a case-by-case basis) that their properties will survive or be restored
- no metal will rust
- no guardian blade can be removed from the consecrated area; attempts to magically do so will rebound with harmful and strange effects on the caster or source.

ELMINSTER'S NOTES

The faith of the Wargod is not my expertise, and Mystra smiles not upon those who cut down any who possess knowledge of the arcane, or an aptitude for magic. Yet I can say something of potions such as those stored at this shrine.

There are many more local and guild symbols, often deliberately cryptic, but these listed are universally understood. To falsely label a potion vial is a serious crime against guild law, Thayan trade rules, and MageFair protocol; the usual punishment is to be magically forced into another shape for a set amount of time (usually not less than half a year).

For some years, the best potions have been prepared and sold in cork-stoppered, wax-sealed steel vials, graven at the necks with symbols to denote their type:

- a circle: *cure light wounds*
- two circles: *cure moderate wounds*
- three circles: *cure serious wounds*
- a triangle: *delay poison*
- a feather: *fly*
- a flame: *fire breath*
- a mouth: *truth*
- a shield: *neutralize poison*
- a spider: *spider climb*
- a star (many crossed rays): *remove blindness/deafness*
- a sun (circle of radiating rays): *remove disease*
- an eye: *vision*
- an eye radiating rays: *darkvision*

VS. PIXIES

BY ANDY COLLINS

Pixies? You're kidding, right?

—Tordek

When the vines and branches around you seem to come alive, when flickering lights tease you by staying just out of reach, or when your fighter starts wandering off in a daze, chances are you've got pixie problems.

The best plan against pixies is to show a good sense of humor. If you can laugh at your own humiliation, chances are they'll go easy on you (and maybe even let you in on the fun). But it's a rare group of adventurers that has the self-confidence to let themselves be the butt of a joke, so this treatise will help you deal with the actual threat that pixies pose.

Defenses: The pixie essentially has *improved invisibility* active all the time. Even if it chooses to show itself (or if you're able to *dispel* it), it can resume its invisibility as a free action, so give up any hope of getting a good look at them. Go with *see invisibility*, or *glitterdust* if you can pick out their location. Blind-Fight can help, although they'll rarely come within melee range of you. Even if you can somehow see them, their substantial Hide and Move Silently skill modifiers make them tough to track down. On top of all of that, thanks to their high spell resistance, they shake off most of the spells you throw at them, and even those that get through will likely be dispelled soon after. Of course, it only takes one lucky *fireball* to take out a whole bunch of them, and you don't need to know exactly where they are for that.

Detection Powers: You'd think that with their various spell-like detection powers that pixies would only pick on those who are obviously evil or greedy. But that clearly isn't true, otherwise they'd be leaving you alone, right? Ahem. Anyway, don't think you'll be able to trick them, because they can read your thoughts.

Messing With Your Head: A pixie wouldn't be a pixie if it couldn't play tricks on your perceptions. In a dim forest, those *dancing lights* look a lot like a group of torches (or a will-o'-wisp, if you're particularly paranoid). Couple that with a *permanent image* or two and you could be convinced that you've come upon a hobgoblin war party, a group of dwarven merchants, or anything else the canny little sprite can think of. Don't assume that just because most of those hobgoblins or dwarves are illusory that all of them are, since any one of them could be a polymorphed pixie trying to pull another fast one on you. They're good at this, and they know it.

Offensive Powers: Up until now, we've talked only about the pixie's generally harmless powers. Now we get to the abilities that can really hamper your party, or even put you in danger if you're not in a safe location. Most would scoff at the danger of a *sleep* arrow, but what if something more dangerous happens to be in the area? Your average dire wolf isn't going to think twice about chowing down on the wizard just because he's asleep. *Confusion* can set your party at each other's throats, and *entangle* and *Otto's irresistible dance* will just plain immobilize you. If a *memory loss* arrow hits you (and if they shoot at you, they will hit you), plan on some rough days ahead as you get "reacquainted" with your former friends. In these cases, the best defense is the saving throw—beef up your Fortitude and Will saves by any means possible. Failing that, try a *dispel magic*, but don't be surprised if they counterspell it with a dispel of their own.

So what's to be done about all of this? Well, the advice is the same as it was at the beginning. Once you've figured out that pixies are to blame for your problems, stop fighting. Have a good laugh, maybe point at your friends and tease them. Just don't try to fight the pixies with conventional means. Sure, a good *fireball* is likely to roast a few—these little guys pretty much epitomize the phrase "glass-jawed"—but where there's one or two pixies, the rest of the tribe isn't likely to be far off. While a playful pixie can be frustrating, a tribe of angry pixies is just plain deadly. They won't think twice about luring you and your murderous friends right into an ettin's den, a wyvern's roost, or worse. Then . . . well, then you've got real problems.

VS. PIXIES TIPS

- Look for invisible creatures.
- Use non-damaging area-effect spells.
- Go with the joke.

VS. PIXIES SPELLS

Pixies are resistant to spells and it's best to humor them until they get bored of tormenting you, but sometimes you won't have time to play around. When that happens, keep these spells in mind:

Color Spray: If they don't succumb to the spell, at least they'll enjoy the show.

Entangle: Spell resistance won't help them, and their low Strength scores will keep them tied up.

Faerie Fire: If you've got a good idea where some of the pixies are hiding, this spell can tell you if you're right.

Fog Cloud: They can't bother what they can't see.

Ghost Sound: You might be able to beat them at their own game. Scare them off or make them think that there are other targets for their pranks nearby.

Sleep: You don't even need to see them. Just target an area an listen for snores.

Nodwick in: HALF-TRUTHS and other Short Subjects

SO, DO YOU ACCEPT THIS QUEST?

WELL, SEEING THAT YOU'RE WILLING TO DROP THE CHARGES FROM THE "INCIDENT" ON THE SOUTH SIDE OF THE CAPITAL...

GOOD! THIS IS THE ONLY CLUE WE HAVE...

THE HALFLINGS ARE UP TO SOMETHING. FIND OUT WHAT, AND YOU CAN NAME YOUR REWARD!

INVOICE
Bruno's Big Beard Barn

DID WE GET THE JOB?

PRETTY MUCH, YEAH. WE'RE SUPPOSED TO FIND OUT WHY THE KINGDOM'S HALFLINGS ARE ACTING FUNNY.

LET ME GET THIS STRAIGHT: YOU DAMAGED PUBLIC PROPERTY AND THAT LEADS TO EMPLOYMENT?

ODD HOW THAT WORKS WITH GOVERNMENTAL ENTITIES, ISN'T IT?

THE INVOICE SAYS THE BEARDS WERE DELIVERED TO THE GNOME COMMUNITY CENTER, BUT THEY WERE PAID FOR BY THE HALFLING HALFITARIAN LEAGUE.

MORE SHORT PEOPLE WEIRD.

SOON, AT THE COMMUNITY CENTER...

...AND WE JUST WANT TO KNOW WHY THESE BEARDS WERE DELIVERED HERE.

AND FOR THE LAST TIME, WE DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU'RE TALKING ABOUT! GET LOST, TALL BOY!

WELL. THAT WAS INFORMATIVE.

THIS LEAFLET FLEW OUT OF THE DOOR WHEN THAT GUY SLAMMED IT.

THERE'S A MAP! AND COUPONS FOR ELEVATOR SHOES!

A MAP TO...

...A MOUNTAIN TOMB!

A TRAIL OF BEARDS LEADS TO THIS?

LET'S SET UP CAMP FOR THE NIGHT. NODWICK, BREAK OUT THE HIBACHI!

I CAN'T SHAKE THE FEELING THAT WE'RE BEING WATCHED!

WITH THIS BUNCH, I FIGURED YOU'D BE USED TO IT BY NOW.

MORNING GREETS OUR HEROES...

RISE AND SHINE! LET'S GO TOMB RAIDING!

YOU ARE NOT GOING TO HAVE ANYTHING TO DO WITH THAT NAUGHTY CROFT WOMAN!

FOR ONCE, I THINK IT WAS AN INNOCENT SLIP. SAY, WHERE'S OUR LARGE-NOSED SWAG-CADDY?

THIS DOESN'T USUALLY HAPPEN UNTIL AFTER WE GO INTO TOMBS.

TURN BACK!!

YOU DON'T SUPPOSE SOMEONE WANTS US TO GIVE UP, DO YOU?

OF COURSE NOT. THIS IS ONE OF THOSE STRANGE COINCIDENCES THAT WE KEEP TELLING YOU ABOUT... LIKE WHEN YOU GET ARRESTED.

OH! THAT MAKES SENSE...

OUR HEROES PRESS ON INTO THE TOMB'S DEPTHS...

I'D CAST MY REDUCE SPELL, BUT THERE'S NOT ENOUGH ROOM FOR THE SOMATIC COMPONENTS!

I GUESS THERE ISN'T ANY WAY FOR ME TO HAUL ANYTHING OUT, RIGHT?

WHAT IS THIS? A CRYPT BUILT FOR HUNCHBACKED MIDGETS?

OH, I'VE GOT A PICK-AXE AND SOME TUNNEL PLANS FOR YOU, HENCH-BOY! WE'RE GETTING SOMETHING OUT OF-

WOW! LOOKIT THAT, GUYS!

OKAY, SO WE'VE GOT A BUNCH OF FAKE BEARDS, GNOMES, HALFLINGS, AND THE WORLD'S LARGEST LAWN ORNAMENT. NOW WHAT?

I'M WORKING ON A THEORY.

I'D WORK ON A WAY OUT! THE ENTRANCE JUST CLOSED!

MORE GOOD NEWS: I CAN HEAR THE TUNNEL CAVING IN. WE'RE TRAPPED!

IT GETS BETTER. I THINK WE'RE GOING TO MEET THE GUY WHO'S BURIED HERE!

WHO DARES TO DISTURB THE SLUMBER OF THE GREAT PICAHUNAL OF LILLYPOOT?! YOU WILL PAY WITH YOUR SOULS!!

GET BACK IN YOUR BOX AND WE WON'T STEP ON YOU.

OKAY...

BYE-BYE!

SO HOW DO WE GET OUT OF HERE?

I'M GLAD YOU ASKED!

A NEW EXIT FROM THE TOMB IS CREATED!

GREAT POLYMORPH SPELL, ARTAX! A GIANT MOLE WAS JUST WHAT WE NEEDED!

THANK YOU!

NOW CHANGE NODWICK BACK TO NORMAL!

AFTER THAT, WE CAN CHAT WITH THE HALFLINGS. I FOUND A SCROLL IN THE TOMB THEY'LL BE UNHAPPY TO SEE...

THE HALFLING HALFITARIAN LEAGUE IS SOON VISITED BY CHAOS!

WHO DEFILES THE AGENDA OF OUR MEETING AND UPSETS THE COMMITTEE STRUCTURE?

WE DO! WE'RE ON TO YOUR SCHEME!

YOU'VE BEEN NAUGHTY! WORSE THAN STEALING COOKIES NAUGHTY!

WE'RE AMAZED THAT IT WORKED FOR SO LONG!

WHA— WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT?

WE FOUND THE TOMB OF YOUR ANCESTOR, PICAHUNAL. HE'S THE ONE THAT COOKED UP THIS SCAM TO MAKE PEOPLE THINK THAT DWARVES, HALFLINGS AND GNOMES ARE THREE SEPARATE RACES.

OH. THAT.

BUT WHAT THE SCROLL DOESN'T SAY IS... WHY?

SIGH... WELL, THESE TWO GUYS... CALL THEM DAVE AND GARY... CAME TO US AND SAID THAT THEY WERE WRITING SOME SOURCEBOOKS OR SOMETHING, AND THEY WOULD PAY HANDSOMELY FOR THE RIGHTS TO OUR RACE'S HISTORY; ROYALTIES, PRODUCT PROMOTIONS, THAT KIND OF THING.

WELL, PICAHUNAL FIGURED THAT THREE RACES WOULD GET MORE MONEY THAN ONE. SO...

WE'VE BEEN LIVING OFF OF THE INTEREST EVER SINCE.

FAKE BEARDS TO MAKE DWARVES AND GNOMES. I'LL BET THEY BUY STEROIDS TO BULK UP THE "DWARVES," TOO!

AND NIGHT CLASSES FOR THEIR "GNOME ENGINEERS." THIS FRAUD IS OVER!

LET'S NOT BE TOO HASTY...

SO, YOU HAVE A LOT OF MONEY?

ONE EXTORTION LATER...

... AND SO WE FOUND OUT THAT A SMALL NUMBER OF HALFLINGS WERE PLANNING TO DISGUISE THEMSELVES AS, UM... PIRATES, UH... SO THEY COULD CORNER... THE... UM, PARROT TRADE. WE STOPPED THEM FOR YOU.

GO BACK TO THE STORY WHERE YOU SAID THE BEARDS WERE PART OF A PLOT TO PUT HAIR IN EVERYONE'S FOOD SO NO ONE WOULD EAT AND THE KINGDOM WOULD STARVE. THAT ONE WAS FUNNIER.

by Chris Pramas

The Empire of Ravilla

Welcome to the Sundered Empire, the setting for *Dungeons & Dragons: Chainmail*. The lands of the Sundered Empire are in Western Oerik on the world of Oerth. This area has never been explored by the denizens of Greyhawk, so it has remained a mystery for countless generations. Now all can be revealed.

The elven Empire of Ravilla once dominated Western Oerik, but as vigilance waned the empire crumbled. While the region was no stranger to warfare, recent events have all but ensured that the fires of war will burn for decades to come.

Five years ago a company of mortal heroes banded together to kill Stratis, the God of War. They believed that by killing Stratis they could win peace for their peoples. They were tragically mistaken. Though the heroes slew the god, Stratis defied his killers in death. As he ascended to the heavens in a pillar of fire, he scattered his panoply across the world. With his dying breath, Stratis proclaimed that there would be nothing but war until a new god ascended to replace him. Now heroes and tyrants struggle to win Stratis's artifacts. It is said that whoever reassembles his panoply will take his place as God of War.

The Empire of Ravilla

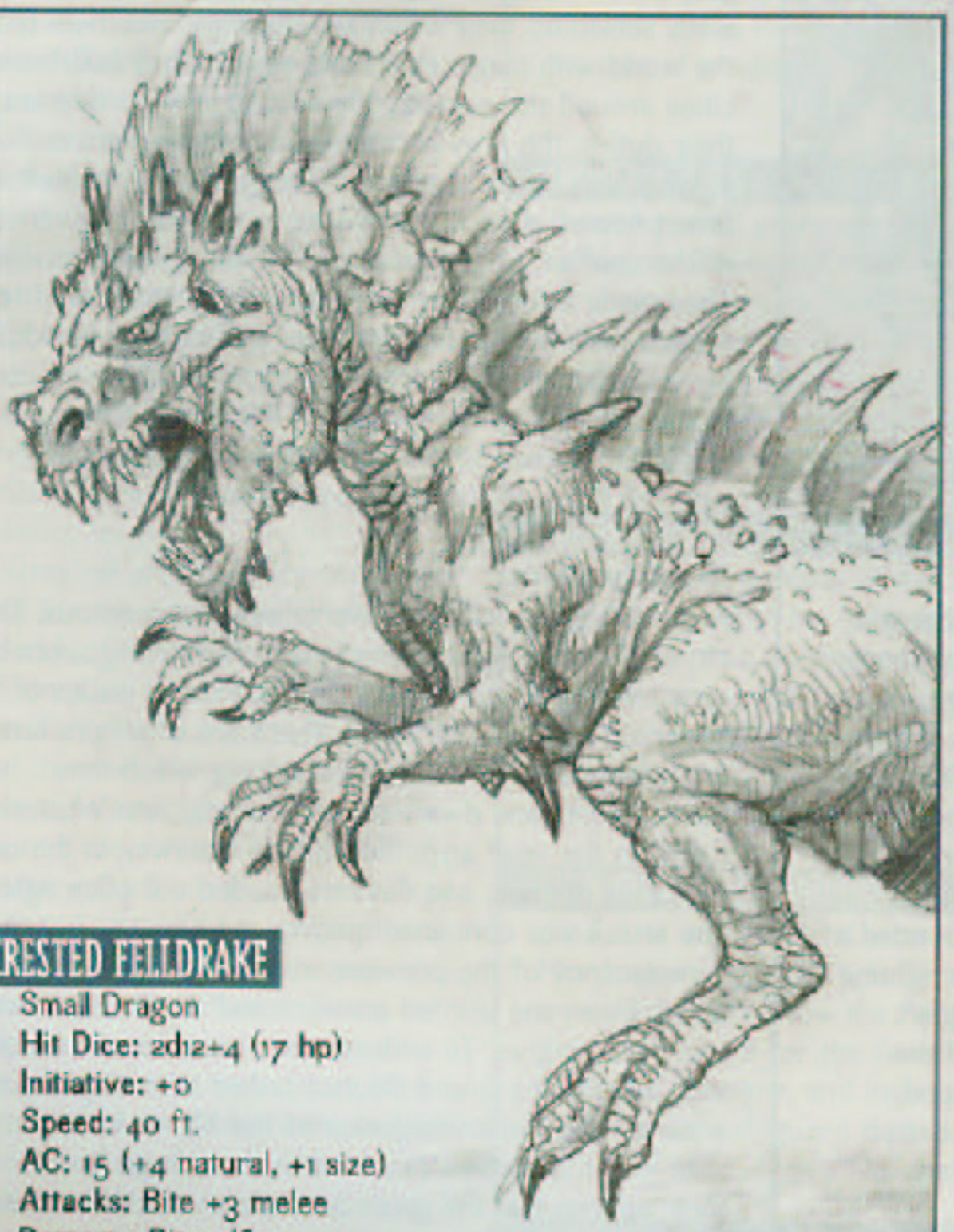
Before the Demon War, the elves were split into two main groups. The wood elves, as their name suggests, lived in the primeval forests of the interior, while the gray elves lived in remote mountain cities. There was little communication between these branches of the elven race, but the Demon War changed everything.

Without warning, enormous portals opened up in the depths of the forest. Armies of demons direct from the Abyss poured into Western Oerik. The wood elves were caught by surprise, and thousands died. Wildfires raged out of control, destroying the heart of the forest and the wood elf homesteads with it. Aid was slow in coming, and the wood elves were on the brink of annihilation.

At this hour, the wood elf hero Peramil mounted his giant eagle and flew through the blackened sky to reach the mountain homes of the gray elves. He fought off winged demons and vicious harpies along the way, but no evil could slow him. Peramil reached the gray elf city of Ventia and told his kin of the holocaust consuming the wood elf homeland.

The gray elves acted quickly. Within the hour, powerful wizards were flying above the battlefields, reconnoitering the enemy positions. Elite strike teams were dispatched to distract the demons while the gray elves mustered their army for war. Soon a hundred thousand elves were marching from the mountains to engage the demonic armies. Bahamut the platinum dragon led his metallic dragons into the fray, and together the allies saved the wood elves from destruction. To show their gratitude, the wood elves swore a great oath, binding them to their kin for the duration of the conflict.

Throughout the long war that followed, wood elf units served with the gray elf army. They became known as Oathbands, and the demons learned to fear their guerrilla tactics and deadly accuracy with the long bow.



CRESTED FELLDRAKE

Small Dragon
Hit Dice: 2d12+4 (17 hp)
Initiative: +0
Speed: 40 ft.
AC: 15 (+4 natural, +1 size)
Attacks: Bite +3 melee
Damage: Bite 1d6+1
Face/Reach: 5 ft. by 5 ft./5 ft.
Special Attacks: None
Saves: Fort +5, Ref +3, Will +4
Abilities: Str 12, Dex 10, Con 14, Int 6, Wis 12, Cha 8
Skills: Hide +2, Jump +2, Listen +3, Spot +4
Feats: Alertness
Climate/Terrain: Temperate plains, forest, and hill
Organization: Solitary, gang (2-5), or pack (6-12)
Challenge Rating: 1
Treasure: None
Alignment: Neutral good
Advancement: 3-6 HD (Small), 7-9 (Medium)

At the height of the Demon War, Bahamut the Platinum Dragon arrived at the head of the metallic dragons. His aid was invaluable in defeating the demonic hordes, and after the war he pledged his continued support. He worked with the powerful elven archmages and together they created the creatures known as felldrakes. There are many different types of felldrake, but all have the blood of Bahamut in their veins. They are fierce, loyal, and good at heart.

The crested felldrake is one of the most common types. They look like small, wingless dragons with bright crests on their heads. Their powerful hind legs give them great speed, and their many sharp teeth serve them well in combat. They are intelligent but somewhat difficult to control in battle.

WIZARDS WORKSHOP

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Build a great base for your miniatures.

DM'S TOOLBOX 114
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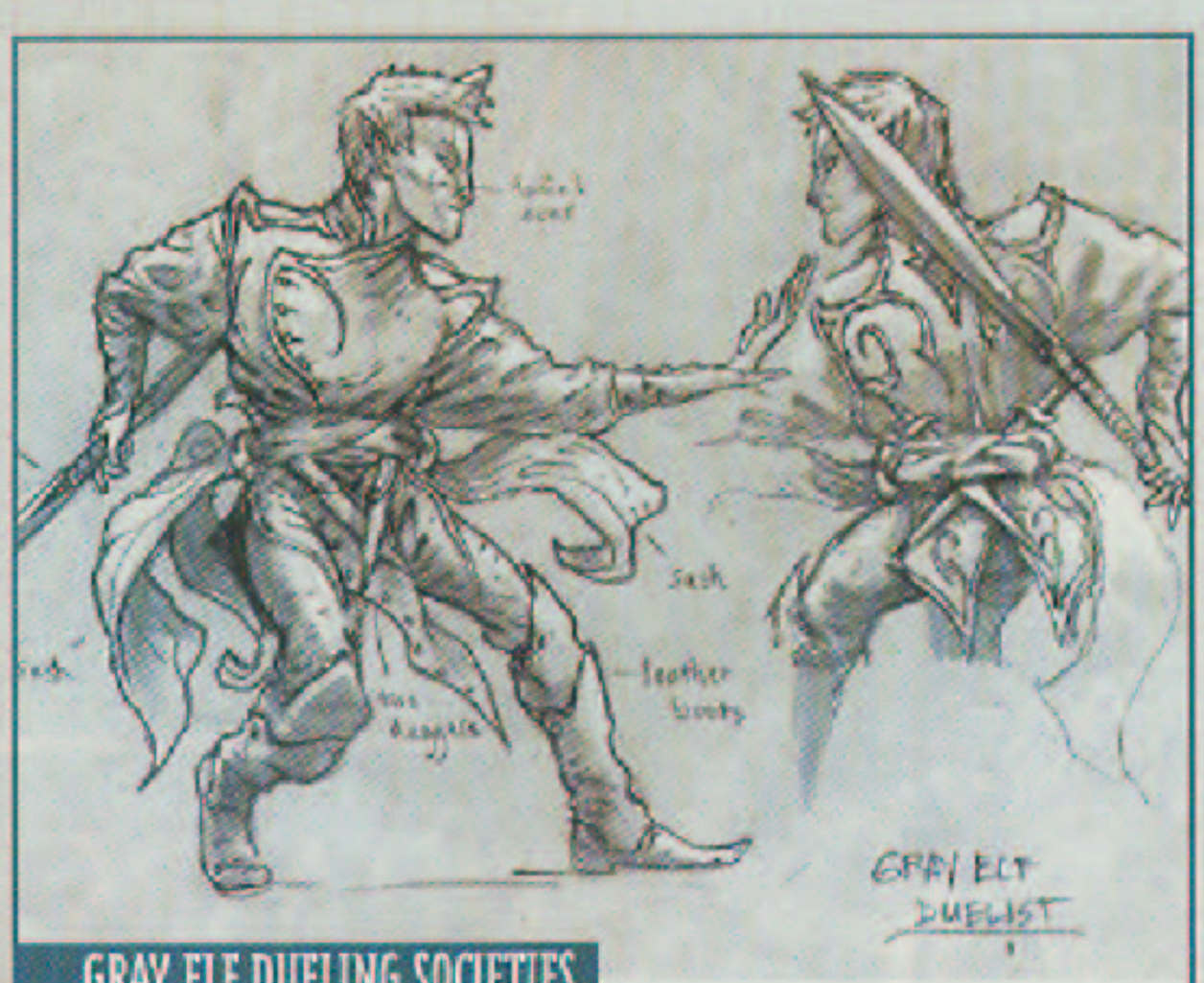


GRAY ELF DUELING SOCIETIES

During the years of the Elven Peace, gray elf society became volatile. It was only natural that such an inward-looking people would change when they became conquerors. The large armies of the previous years were demobilized, and a smaller, standing army protected the borders of the empire. The veterans of over twenty years of campaigning came home at last, but they found it difficult to readjust. They still longed for the martial life, and they found the cities rather boring.

Shortly after their return, one group of veterans founded a dueling society. Their stated aim was to maintain their fighting skills in case Ravilla should ever have need of them again. Within a decade, dueling societies had sprung up in all the major cities, and it wasn't long before rivalries developed. Common citizens argued about which society had the better fighting style, and occasionally rival students would clash in the streets.

As the centuries wore on, the nature of the dueling societies changed. Most of the founding veterans died or moved on, and the martial societies they founded became socially prestigious organizations. When war did return to Ravilla, the dueling societies had difficulty fulfilling their original purpose. By this point the societies trained with a bewildering array of exotic weapons, and members specialized in individual combat. That worked well in formal duels or street encounters, but it counted for little in the rank and file of the army.

Nonetheless, dueling societies continued to play an important role in gray elf society. Since the fall of Stratis, duelists have been increasingly involved in Ravilla's skirmish battles. They excel at this form of warfare, where individual skill counts for more than discipline and formation. The figure above is a member of the North Wind Society. They specialize in fighting with the two-bladed sword.

Creating a Duelist PC: If you'd like to play a North Wind duelist in your D&D campaign, it's a simple matter of feat selection. Make a 1st level elven fighter and take the feats Ambidexterity and Two-Weapon Fighting. At 1st level your character is learning to wield the two-bladed sword but will not yet have won the right to use it. When the character reaches 2nd level, take Exotic Weapon Proficiency (two-bladed sword) as your fighter feat. The society then presents the character with a weapon in a solemn initiation ceremony and welcomes him or her as a full member.

An Elven Nation

After the Demon War, Corellon Larethian tasked the gray elves with guarding the Abyssal Gateways. The elves sealed up their mountain cities and hid them from the world with magic spells and wards. They built new cities around the portals. Should they ever prove lax in their duties, the gray elves will pay a heavy price.

What was left of the wood elves returned to their forest homes after the war. Due to the destructiveness of the conflict, only a small part of the forest remained. They made a formal agreement with the gray elves to ensure their own protection. The wood elf lands would become part of the new elven nation, but gray elf control would end at the borders of the forest. The wood elves also agreed to provide Oathbands for service with the gray elf army in times of war.

The City States

At first the gray elf cities were fairly autonomous. The city-states that emerged had many forms of government, with a Grand Council that addressed issues of import to all the elven lands. This state of affairs lasted for nearly five hundred years, during which time human tribes and dwarven clans spread into Western Oerik. In the year 499, the Abyssal Gateway in the city of Xanos opened, and demons flooded out once again. The attack was contained quickly and bloodily, but the complacency of the previous centuries had been shattered. Everyone wanted answers and the Grand Council had none to give. To address the concerns of the common citizen, the Grand Council tasked a small group of wizards with the investigation of the Xanos Incident.

In 505 the wizards reported their findings. It was their opinion that the gate's activation was due to the abnormally large number of sorcerers in Xanos. In a stunning declaration, the wizards claimed that the secret and previously unknown root of sorcerous power was the Abyss. The scientific method of wizardry was thus the only safe way to practice arcane magic.

Sorcerers across the city-states protested vehemently. They argued that it was the blood of dragons that gave them their power, not the influence of demons. The Grand Council was looking for a scapegoat, however, and the wizards had given them one. To protect the elven people, the Grand Council turned from an advisory body to a ruling one. The city-states were now to become parts of a greater whole. The gray elf citizens, frightened by the taste of war they had received, wholeheartedly approved of the Grand Council's action.

From City-States to Empire

The Grand Council's next move was to enact an official ban on sorcery. Its practice was specifically linked to demonology and its practitioners were declared a danger to elven security. Over the ensuing five years, sorcerers in the city-states were hunted by specialized teams of mage hunters. They were forced to renounce their sorcerous ways or go into exile. Many left and never returned.

The most successful mage hunter was an elf named Trigorian. He unearthed a cabal of sorcerous cultists, and their public trial made Trigorian a hero. When the sorcerers of Ravilla had been dealt with, the ambitious Trigorian turned to politics, and in 513 he was elected to the Grand Council. He immediately agitated for a wider effort against sorcery. He argued persuasively that city-states could not be kept safe if sorcerers were allowed to run wild beyond their borders. The council tripled the size of the army, while Trigorian urged the citizens to war. Hostilities commenced in 515.

Gray elf armies swept south and east for the next twenty years, aided by Oathbands of their wood elf kin. They overran a myriad of petty kingdoms and drove humans and dwarves before them. By the time the campaign had run its course, the elves controlled all of Western Oerik north of the Blasted Desert with two exceptions: the dwarven kingdom and the new human nation of Thalos. The dwarves were not a sorcerous people, so costly assaults on their mountain strongholds were considered unnecessary. The island nation of Thalos was assaulted in 550, but the inspirational leadership of their Queen Almira helped the humans defeat the veteran elven legions. Although Trigorian agitated for a renewed attack, none would back him. The elven people were tired of war.

Thus the elven city-states became an empire. The official year of this event is 525, when the city-states unified permanently as the Empire of Ravilla. The members of the Grand Council became known as the Oligarchs and their power was vast. They presided over the zenith of Ravillan achievement, the Elven Peace of 552-698.

Everything Falls Apart

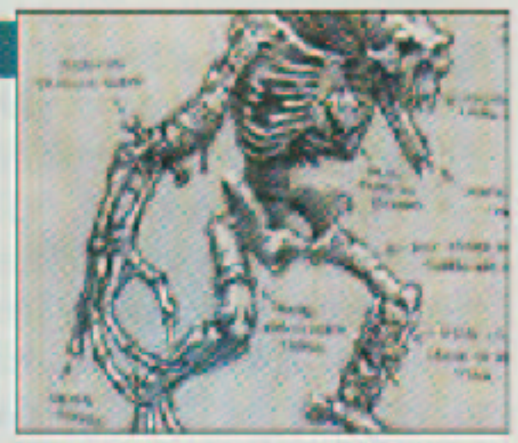
The Empire of Ravilla could not last. In future issues, the other factions of *CHAINMAIL* will be examined, and it will be revealed how mighty Ravilla became the Sundered Empire. Until then . . . D

FACTIONS OF THE SUNDERED EMPIRE

Since the fall of Stratis, the Sundered Empire has been soaked with blood. Armies crisscross the land, leaving destruction in their wake. Every army uses advanced parties, scouting forces, and other small units in the war, and it is this level of conflict that is the focus of the initial release of *CHAINMAIL* rules and miniatures. You take the role of a warband commander dedicated to one of six starting factions:

AHMUT'S LEGION

Three hundred years ago, the nomad warlord Ahmut terrorized Ravilla before an assassin's knife put him in an unmarked grave. This dread warrior was reanimated by the spear of the God of War, and he now leads an undead army in a mad quest for vengeance. He has the aid of a forbidden death cult, whose powerful necromantic magic helps keep his army in the field.



DRAZEN'S HORDE

The savage humanoids of the Southlands were never a real threat until the hobgoblin commander Drazen forged the orcs, goblins, ogres, and hobgoblins into a cohesive army. They crossed the Blasted Desert in an epic march and attacked with complete surprise. With Stratis's axe in his hand, Drazen is all but unstoppable.

THE PEOPLE'S STATE OF MORDENGARD

Just over one hundred years ago, the dwarves of Mordengard toppled their Tyrant King and established a worker's state. Now the People's Legion has taken to the field to fight for the freedom of the dwarves. With skill, bravery, and ingenious elemental weapons, the dwarves safeguard their revolution.

NARESH

Jangir, a gnoll priest with demonic blood in his veins, has united the gnolls under the banner of his abyssal patron Yeenoghu. Now gnoll and demon march in step, as Jangir spreads chaos and terror for the glory of his god. If Jangir succeeds in reopening the Abyssal Gateways in the heart of Ravilla, his demon horde would sweep away all opposition.

THE EMPIRE OF RAVILLA

This elven state used to rule the whole region, but now it is an empire in name only. Ravilla lost most of its land in a long series of disastrous wars. Now the city-dwelling gray elves and their wood elf allies have been driven back to their original borders. They are engaged in a life-or-death struggle with not only the forces of evil but also the crusading humans of Thalos.

THALOS

Thalos was founded by human tribes fleeing from the advancing armies of Ravilla. The current queen, Almira XXI, declared a holy crusade that fired up the Thalish people. She aims to conquer the ancient lands of the human tribes, lost so long ago. Her armies, led by paladins and assisted by gnome engineers, have enjoyed great success in their initial campaigns.

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Repairing the Ranger

When I expressed my intention to play a ranger to my DM, he stated his opinion that the ranger was especially weak compared to the other classes. I was skeptical but shrugged when he offered something later (a bonus feat, maybe) to help balance the discrepancy.

Well, it turns out that he's right. Actually, in my opinion, he was more right than he knew.

I later modified my concept into a ranger/druid for a few reasons, none of which had to do with my DM's perception of the ranger as weak. Currently Kirellin is 1/1, soon to gain another level, and the reasons to take that level in ranger are almost non-existent.

If I take ranger, I immediately get a +1 base attack bonus, +1 to Fortitude saves, 1d10 HD, and 4 skill points.

> ***The ranger is almost certainly the weakest class in the game.***

If I take druid, I immediately get a +1 base attack bonus, +1 to Fortitude and Will saves, 1d8 HD, 4 skill points, woodland stride, an orison, and a 1st-level spell.

Maybe the answer is that the benefits of taking levels in ranger are deferred. What can I look forward to in the next five ranger levels? A +5 base attack bonus, 5d10 HD, +3 Fortitude save, +2 Reflex save, +2 Will save, an additional favored enemy at +1, improvement of my current favored enemy to +2, and a single 1st-level spell.

By contrast, the next five druid levels provide a +4 base attack bonus, 5d8 HD, +3 to Fortitude save, +2 to Reflex save, +3 to Will save, woodland stride, trackless step, resist nature's lure, *wild shape* twice a day, 2 orisons, 2 1st-level spells, 3 2nd-level spells, and 2 3rd-level spells.

So how does +1 base attack bonus, 5 hit points on average, an additional favored enemy, and +1 on my current favored enemy stack up against +1 Will save, woodland stride, trackless step, resist nature's lure, *wild shape* twice a day, and nine additional spells?

It's not even close, and it doesn't get better as you extend the progression. The only additional special ability the ranger gets—the ability to buy Improved Two-Weapon Fighting—depends on having a level in ranger and a base attack bonus of +9. If I wanted to buy the feat while taking druid levels, I'd have to wait an additional two levels.

My conclusions?

First, the ranger is almost certainly the weakest class in the game. It has few special abilities, and almost all of those it does have are focused on fighting, and the ranger—unable to wear decent armor, unable to specialize, with as few feats as any non-Fighter class—is only a passable warrior.

Second, those benefits that make the ranger at all attractive are all concentrated at 1st level. Track, Ambidexterity, Two-Weapon Fighting, martial weapon proficiency, favored enemy, and the ability to buy Improved Two-Weapon Fighting later.

Therefore, while there are reasons to take a single level of ranger, there are no compelling game mechanic reasons to go beyond 1st level in ranger. So what's the fix?

Off the top of my head, I'd accelerate the acquisition of favored enemies to every 4th level rather than every 5th. I'd also allow the ranger to improve his bonus against a current favored enemy by 2 (as opposed to 1) in lieu of gaining a new favored enemy. Maybe give a bonus feat at 2nd level and every 4th level thereafter (2nd, 6th, 10th, 14th, 18th). At 3rd level, give the ranger nature sense. At 7th, woodland stride. At 11th, trackless step. At 15th, the ability to track someone who is using trackless step. At 17th, the scent ability, per the *Monster Manual*. At 19th, blindsight with a 5-ft. radius.

I have two concerns with the progression above. The first is that maybe (but only maybe) it overbalances in the other direction. The second is that it overlaps too much with druid abilities. On the other hand, nature sense, woodland stride, and trackless step make sense for a ranger, and they do get them later than druids. On the third hand, I've never really understood the point of giving rangers spells.

Comments?

Jeff Wilder • San Francisco, CA

Eye of the Beholder

Recently a friend encouraged me to pick up the new edition. She knew I quit D&D when 2nd Edition came out. I said I'd give it a look, and I liked most everything.

I was disappointed to see Charisma is still a stat. The definition doesn't bother me as much as the race restrictions. After all, if it is a force of personality, self-esteem, and physical attractiveness, then why should half-orcs and dwarves be penalized? Growing up in their respective communities, they might not be viewed as unattractive and feel pretty good about themselves. Beauty is in the eye of the beholder, and there's no reason they couldn't have a strong force of personality.

I recall in 1st Edition a chart to show inter-race reactions. For example, elves and half-elves interacting within human communities could be given a bonus, but a penalty in dealing with orcs and dwarves.

As levels go up, a character should be able to have a greater Charisma just because she's been there and done that—and knows others have not. A 10th-level half-orc should impress the heck out of a 1st-level anybody.

For looks there was an optional stat called Comeliness. That should be used for looks and modifiers for interactions with other races.

For force of personality, call it something else; *Runequest* and *Stormbringer* used POWer. This stat would be more useful for all spellcasters. It could represent the characters' ability to harness and bend the powers of the universe. Having it increase, or a random chance for increase, could reflect the character's growth.

Douglas McLeod • Oakland, CA

#282's Question of the Month

What is our gaming environment like?

We game every Tuesday in my basement. The basement is finished, and it has all the accouterments, such as a coffee maker, fridge, stereo, phone, and restroom.

The players begin filtering in at 6 P.M., and we begin at 6:15 P.M. Usually there are between five and eight players, depending on who is working late, who had a doctor's appointment, and so on. The players who can't make it let me know a day in advance so I can plan their part in the story for that session. Since players usually have multiple characters in the same vicinity, it's easy to have them move in and out of the story without disrupting the scenario.

There is quite a bit of humor and discussion during the game, and sometimes not one die is rolled as the evening is filled with roleplaying. Other nights we play out a battle, and that can take one session as well. If I'm feeling a momentous event could happen during an evening's session, I will call a "You say it, your character says it" night in which everything is taken literally. The players know it's going to be enforced, and rarely do anything out of character. The few times they have acted out of character resulted in a few curses and shouts. Nothing caused by this rule has been terrible, however. On the contrary, it usually focuses the entire group. I don't like to do that too often, simply because it makes it more special when used sparingly.

Around 9:00 P.M., the guys begin packing their stuff and heading out. That leaves me with 30 minutes to put the dirty coffee mugs and trash away. I also use this time to put in the XP and changes to the characters in the computer. In conclusion, our gaming environment is somewhat structured but conducive to the gamers who play in it.

The Cobster • cob37jam@yahoo.com

Weak Split

After eagerly awaiting the arrival of the new *Psionics Handbook*, I'm sad to say that much of it has greatly disappointed me. There are two main things that bother me. First and foremost is the division of the psionicist class into two weaker psionic classes. The psion, while having a great power list to choose from, is incredibly weak when compared to any of the spellcasting classes from the *Players Handbook*. A psion knows about as many powers as the sorcerer does but has the power to manifest them less often than a wizard one level lower per day. The bonus power points in no way equal what any other spellcaster would get from an equally high ability score and the d4 Hit Dice and wizard/sorcerer attack figures completely prevent the crafting of a psion character who would consider entering melee.

The psychic warrior isn't much better. The few powers the class gets are hardly worth the trouble when looking at the pathetic list of powers to choose from. No healing, no offensive damage powers, just feats, which are great but most of the better ones require power points to spend and the psychic warrior has very few of those and no bonus power points even though the bard, paladin, and ranger all get bonus spells for higher abilities. Where is the balance that everybody seems to crave? The new psionic classes are a slap in the face to anyone who likes psionics.

My second gripe is toward the new psionic combat system. Attack and defense modes make no more sense now than they did in the 2nd Edition, and now the defender is forced to pay for each defense separately rather than having it last the whole round. The whole idea of being caught flat-footed by a mental attack is ridiculous, as is the whole notion of a non-psionic buffer. Where do these ideas come from? A psionicist's mind is always closed to mental attacks and non-psionic creatures should be more vulnerable to psionics, not less.

Well I've said my piece; even though I doubt you people at *Dragon* will ever print this I can tell you that there are many others who feel as I do about the new rules.

Kenneth G. VanSell II

THE UNSPEAKABLE OAF by John Kovalic

WIZARDS WORKSHOP

SILICON SORCERY

by Rick Moscatello

This month, we visit *Age of Kings*, a great real-time strategy game. In this game, players control mini-civilizations, each with attributes similar to real-world cultures. For example, the British build long-bowmen, while the Persians build elephants. The real world might not sound like a good place for fantasy gaming ideas, but *Age of Kings* is loaded with good stuff for your campaign.

New Feats

The elite warriors of each civilization in *Age of Kings* have different special abilities. Many of these historically based advantages translate well into D&D game feats.

WALL BREAKER

HILL FIGHTER

Hills and slopes are important features in the landscape of Age of Kings. A warrior fighting downhill has a significant damage bonus.

Hill Fighter

You are skilled at fighting from higher ground.

Prerequisite: Base attack bonus +2

Benefit: When attacking from higher ground, you gain a +2 circumstance bonus to melee attack rolls or a +1 circumstance bonus to ranged attack rolls.

Normal: You gain a +1 circumstance bonus to melee attack rolls for attacking from higher ground and no bonus to ranged attack rolls.

Certain units can destroy buildings with alarming speed. The Huns have the Tarkan, a dozen of which can annihilate a castle in seconds.

Wall Breaker

You have a knack for destroying inanimate objects.

Prerequisite: Str 13+, Power Attack

Benefit: A character with this feat can ignore the first 5 points of hardness when striking an object. Note that this is not extra damage, so if the object doesn't have any hardness, the feat does not help.

By practicing husbandry, many civilizations can increase the speed of their mounted units.

Fast Rider

You are a talented rider, able to get better performance from any animal you ride.

Prerequisite: Handle Animal skill, Ride skill

Benefit: When you are riding a mount that is carrying no more than a light load, its base speed is increased by 10 feet. Your mount's overland movement rate increases by 1 mile per hour, or 8 miles per day.

New Creature

The *Age of Kings* world is decidedly non-magical. Troops don't gain levels, there are no magic weapons, and spells are limited to priest abilities. The only exception to this involves the siege weapons, which can move and fire without human assistance. Who would have thought the ancient civilizations of earth would have access to such powerful magic?

LIVING CATAPULTS

LIVING CATAPULT

Huge Construct

Hit Dice:	16d10 (88 hp)
Initiative:	-1 (-1 Dex)
Speed:	20 ft.
AC:	22 (-2 size, -1 Dex, +15 natural)
Attacks:	Slam +20 melee; boulder +15 ranged
Damage:	slam 2d6+15; boulder 5d6+10
Face/Reach:	10ft. by 20ft./10 ft
Special Attacks:	Launch boulder, Trample
Special Qualities:	Construct, magic immunity, damage reduction 15/+1
Saves:	Fort +5, Ref +4, Will +4
Abilities:	Str 30, Dex 8, Con –, Int –, Wis 9, Cha 1
Climate/Terrain:	Any land
Organization:	Solitary or gang (2-5)
Challenge Rating:	9
Treasure:	None
Alignment:	Always neutral
Advancement:	17-32 (Gargantuan), 33-48 HD (Colossal)

Living catapults are magically created automatons, constructed by clerics in need of weapons that can destroy castles or fight at extended range. These devices are essentially specialized forms of golems, more effective on battlefields than in dungeon settings. As these siege engines are designed for large scale conflicts, their creator can control them at a range of 600 feet.

Combat

Living catapults are normally set up to attack foes from afar but when enemies get too close, they attempt to run them down or smash them.

Launch Boulder (Ex): As a standard action, a living catapult can pick up a boulder weighing 60 to 80 pounds (Medium-size object) with its launching arm and hurl it as a ranged weapon with a 200-foot range increment.

Trample (Ex): As a standard action during its turn each round, the creature can literally run over an opponent at least one size category smaller than itself. The trample deals 3d12+5 bludgeoning damage. A trampled opponent can either attempt attacks of opportunity at a -4 penalty or make a Reflex save (DC 28) for half damage.

Construct: Immune to mind-influencing effects, poison, disease, and similar effects. Not subject to critical hits, subdual damage, ability damage, energy drain, or death from massive damage.

Magic Immunity (Ex): Living catapults completely resist most magical and supernatural effects, except as follows: *Warp wood* or *wood shape* spells cause 2d8 points of damage and hold the living catapult immobile for 1 round. Fire effects cause damage normally.

Living Catapults at work

Construction

A living catapult costs 45,000 gp to create. Assembling the body requires a successful Knowledge (engineering) check (DC 15) and a Craft (carpentry) check (DC 15).

The creator must be at least 16th-level and able to cast divine spells. The ritual drains 1,500 XP from the creator and requires *animate objects*, *divine power*, and *resurrection*.

The cavalry archers of Parthia were famous for shooting arrows at pursuers as they retreated. This made them incredibly effective, especially against slower opponents.

Improved Mounted Archery

You make ranged attacks from a mount almost as well as you can from the ground.

Prerequisite: Ride skill, Mounted Combat, Mounted Archery

Benefit: The penalty you suffer when using a ranged weapon if your mount is taking a double move is eliminated, and the penalty for using a ranged weapon when your mount is running is halved to -2 instead of -4. You can move before and after your attack, provided the total distance is not greater than your mount's speed.

FAST RIDER

WIZARDS WORKSHOP

SAGE ADVICE

by Skip Williams

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Most of the psionic powers and feats that improve the user's Armor Class seem to create a sort of force field around the user. So, will they afford the user protection from touch attacks or ranged touch attacks?

A touch attack or ranged touch attack bypasses any armor bonus or natural armor bonus. Incorporeal touch attacks bypass armor and natural armor bonuses, except for armor bonuses that come from force effects.

The Inertial Armor feat and the *ectoplasmic armor* power do indeed use psychic force. The armor bonuses work against incorporeal touch attacks but not other touch attacks (and their descriptions note this fact).

Powers that provide natural armor bonuses, such as *lesser natural armor*, are not effective against any kind of touch attack.

Other powers that improve Armor Class with a different kind of bonus work against all types of touch attacks. For example, the *combat precognition* power provides a +1 insight bonus to Armor Class, and it is effective against touch attacks of all kinds.

This month's column features questions and answers about the new Psionics Handbook.

Does the Inertial Armor feat or the *inertial barrier* power block the *disintegrate* spell or *disintegrate* power? In earlier editions of the psionics rules, *inertial barrier* was effective against *disintegration*. What about the *ectoplasmic armor* power? Does it have any effect against the *disintegrate* spell or *disintegrate* power?

No in all three cases. Both the *disintegrate* spell and *disintegrate* power produce rays, which are ranged touch attacks. As noted in the previous answer, touch attacks ignore the armor bonuses that the Inertial Armor feat and *ectoplasmic armor* power provide.

An *inertial barrier* stops blows, cuts, and slashes, but not rays or other touch attacks. The *inertial barrier* power, however, provides damage reduction 10/+5. Damage reduction can stop normal or subdual damage from an incorporeal touch attack, but not energy drain or other touch delivered spell-like or supernatural effects. For example, a spectre deals 1d8 points of damage with its incorporeal touch attack. If the spectre touched a character protected by an *inertial barrier*, the touch would not inflict damage, but the character still would be subject to the spectre's energy drain ability.

The description of the Inertial Armor feat says that the armor bonus provided by the feat does not stack with the armor bonus provided by a shield or regular armor. Can a character who takes this feat stack the armor bonus from *bracers of armor* with Inertial Armor? What about natural armor? What about the *ectoplasmic armor* power?

Two armor bonuses don't stack (except the armor bonus from one shield and one suit of armor you wear). The Inertial Armor feat, the *ectoplasmic armor* power, *bracers of armor*, shields, and suits of armor all provide armor bonuses, so their effects do not stack. Note that the *ectoplasmic armor* power is something you wear, so it stacks with a shield.

Natural armor bonuses do stack with armor bonuses, so the Inertial Armor feat and the *lesser natural armor* power stack.

Armor Class bonuses that are not armor bonuses, such as the insight bonus from the *combat precognition* power, stack with other armor bonuses, as do deflection bonuses, such as the bonus from a *ring of protection*.

Can you spend extra points on the Psionic Fist feat and deal extra damage? Could you, for example, pay two power points for an unarmed strike that deals an extra +2d4 points of damage? Also, the feat description says you can hold a "charge" for a maximum number of rounds equal to your Strength modifier +1 or until your next attack, whichever comes first. What happens if you have a negative Strength modifier?

The Psionic Fist feat lets you spend 1 point to gain an extra 1d4 points of damage on your unarmed strikes. You can spend only 1 point on the feat at a time. If you're holding a charge and you spend another point, the effects don't stack, but the maximum time you can hold the charge is measured from the time you spent the extra point.

The prerequisite for the Psionic Fist feat is a Strength score of 13 or more (Strength modifier +1). If your Strength score ever falls below 13, you can no longer use the feat because you no longer meet the prerequisite (see page 77 in the *Player's Handbook*).

Suppose a character has Stand Still, Combat Reflexes, and the Hold the Line feat from *Sword & Fist*. Hold the Line allows the character to make an attack of opportunity when the character is charged. Thus, Stand Still can be used to keep the charging attacker from entering the area the character

threatens. The attacker gets a Fortitude save against the Stand Still effect, but if the attacker fails the save, the attacker has to stop moving and thus loses the charge attack, right?

Yes, you can use Stand Still and Hold the Line to stop charge attacks, so long as your opponent doesn't outreach you. (If your opponent has a longer reach than you do, the opponent can attack you without entering the area you threaten.)

Am I right in assuming that with the Combat Reflexes feat, the Stand Still feat can be used multiple times in a round against separate opponents, even when flat-footed?

Yes, you can use Stand Still whenever you make an attack of opportunity. The Combat Reflexes feat gives you extra attacks of opportunity each round and lets you make attacks of opportunity even when flat footed, so if you have that feat you can use Stand Still when you're flat footed.

On page 75 in *Dragon* #281 it says that if you are a nonpsionic character, the only attack you have to fear is the Mind Blast because the Will save DCs for all other attack modes are -8 or -9 against nonpsionic defender. I cannot find this rule anywhere in the *Psionics Handbook*. Could you tell me where it states this?

Check out table 4–1 on page 42, specifically the "nonpsionic buffer" line.

Suppose a psionic character has power points and has not been caught flat-footed. Can he elect not to use a psionic defense and simply make an unadjusted Will save against an attack? Could the character still use the Psychic Bastion feat in this circumstance?

As noted in the previous answer, you have to use the "flat-footed or out of power points" line from Table 4–1 if you don't mount a defense against a psionic attack. If you're not flat-footed, you could use the Psychic Bastion feat. If you're caught flat-footed, you can't mount a defense. You can use the Psychic Bastion feat anytime you're conscious and have at least 3 power points to spend.

Once a character has used all her power points, can the character use the nonpsionic buffer defense if subjected to a psionic attack? What if the character multiclasses and has one or more nonpsionic classes? Can she use a nonpsionic buffer then?

No. Only nonpsionic creatures can use the nonpsionic buffer line. If you're psionic and you fail to mount a defense for any reason, you have to use the "flat-footed or out of power points" line from Table 4–1.

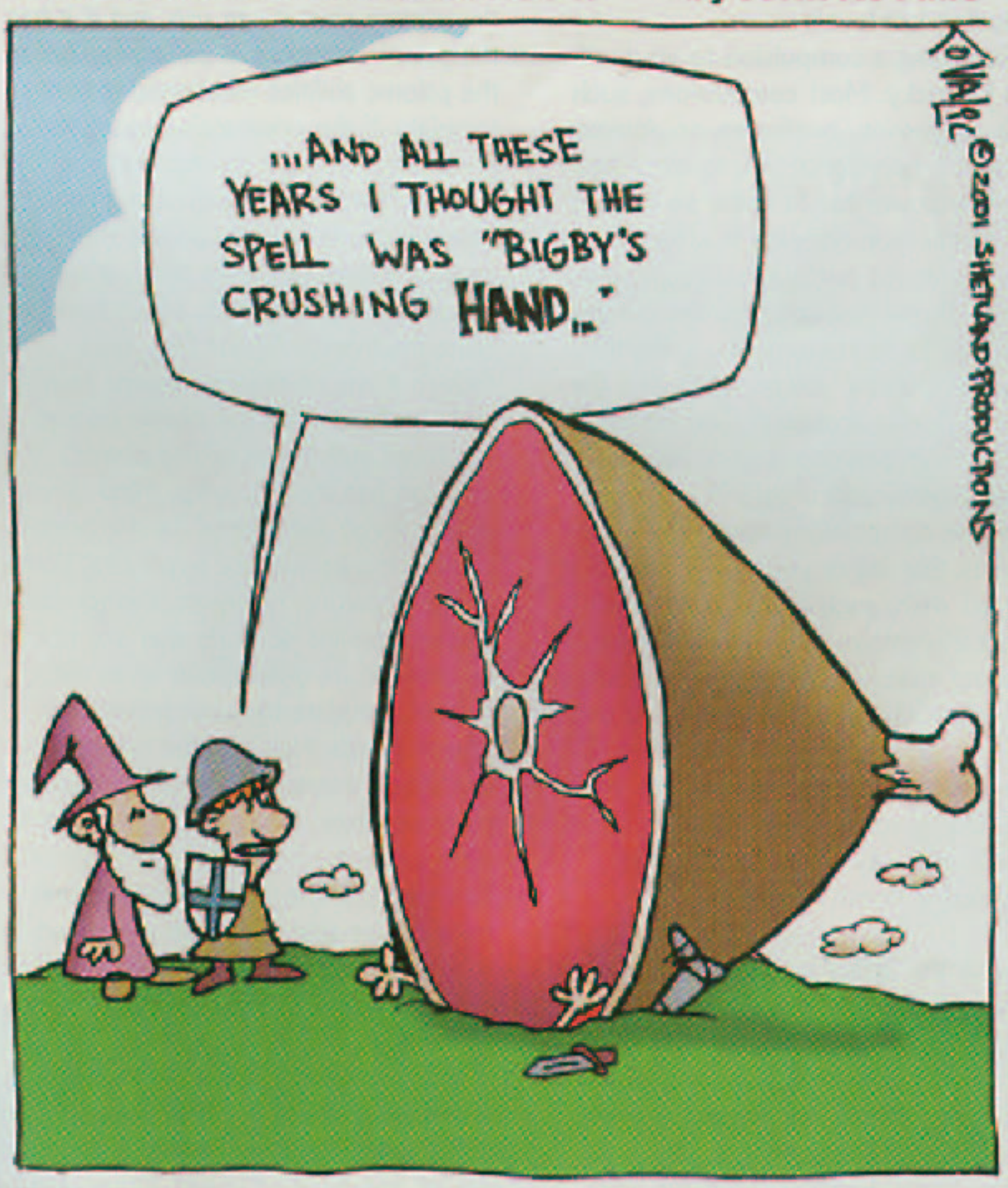
Is there any limit on how many power points one can spend on the *psychofeedback* power in a given round? High-level psions can have hundreds of power points and could potentially spend all of them to accomplish some incredible feats or to create some truly terrible save DCs. Is this as it was intended, or is there some limit to how high this number can go?

There's no limit on the number of points you can spend on *psychofeedback*. If you want to blow all your points to get a really big modifier, you can. If you do, you'd better hope you don't have to deal with any psionic combat while your points are depleted.

Can the *metaphysical weapon* power be used on unarmed attacks? If so, would the entire body of the manifester glow with pale silver radiance?

The *metaphysical weapon* power works on weapons, not creatures. You cannot use the power on a creature to give its unarmed attacks or natural weapons an enhancement bonus. You can however, use the power on intelligent weapons, which are creatures of the construct type. You cannot use

THE UNSPEAKABLE OAF by John Kovalic



metaphysical weapon on constructs that are not intelligent weapons. If you do use *metaphysical weapon* on an intelligent weapon, the enhancement bonus from the power does not stack with the enhancement bonus the weapon already has, or with any other enhancement bonus that might be applied to the weapon.

Can the *float* power be used on the manifester?

The power's target can be any object or creature whose weight does not exceed 300 pounds per caster level. Such a target could be the manifester, provided he doesn't exceed the weight limit.

Can you perform *psychic chirurgery* on yourself? What would the effects be?

The power can target any living creature within range. If you're a living creature and capable of manifesting the power, the target can be yourself.

You can repair damage to yourself in the same manner as you can repair damage to another creature, including lost levels.

Removing a compulsion to yourself can be tricky. Most compulsions, such as a *suggestion*, *confusion*, or *dominate person*, simply force you to obey and you are powerless to resist so long as the compulsion remains in effect. Some circumstances might allow you a new saving throw to overcome the compulsion, but in such cases you make the new save and if you're successful the compulsion is broken or you fail and you remain powerless to resist. In either case, *psychic chirurgery* is irrelevant.

Some compulsions have long-term effects that leave you fairly free to act as you wish, such as the *quest* spell. You can remove such effects by performing *psychic chirurgery* on yourself.

Technically, you can choose to use *psychic chirurgery* on yourself to transfer your own knowledge to yourself. Doing so, however, doesn't benefit you in any way. Your transferred knowledge doesn't stack.

How is the *inflict pain* power supposed to work? The power inflicts 3d6 points of damage. The power's duration is concentration, up to 5 rounds. Does this mean the power deals damage every round that it lasts?

The listed duration is wrong. The correct duration is instantaneous. **This is official errata.**

When using Table 4–43 in the *Dungeon Master's Guide* to generate an NPC, how do you determine the highest-level psion or psychic warrior?

Roll 1d4 + the community modifier for either class.

Some psionic monsters are very powerful psionically, but they don't use psionic power points. Can these creatures use feats or magic items that require reserve power points? Also can they use feats or other things that cost power points to use? The monster section in the *Psionics Handbook* says they use psionic powers and combat modes for free. It doesn't mention anything else, such as psionic feats.

A creature has no psionic power points (reserve or otherwise) unless it also has a psionic character class. This is true even for creatures with the psionic template.

A creature can always make use of any feat or power the creature's description says it can use, and if it has the psionic template, it can make use of the psionic abilities mentioned in the template. If the creature's description gives it access to a psionic feat, it can use the feat, even though it has no reserve points (and it can use the feat even if it does not meet the feat's prerequisites). For example, a blue benefits from the Inertial Armor feat even though it has no reserve power points and can freely use the *charm person*, *far hand*, and *finger of fire* powers. It also can use the *ego whip*, *mind thrust*, *empty mind*, and *mental barrier* psionic combat modes without expending points.

The creature, however, cannot use psionic abilities or feats that are not included in its description or in the psionic template because it has no power points. Nor can the creature use magic items that require a power point reserve.

Can you use the Trigger Power feat on a power that has been enhanced with a metapsionic feat? For instance, can you trigger a maximized version of *ultrablast*?

You can't use Trigger Power on *ultrablast* because it's a 7th-level power and you can use the feat only on powers of 3rd-level or lower. Otherwise, yes, you can trigger a metapsionicly enhanced power. Your reserve has to match the enhanced power's increased cost. Note that there is a limit to how much you can enhance a power with a metapsionic feat: The total cost can't be higher that your psionic character level minus one (see page 23 of the *Psionics Handbook*).

Table 1–2 in the *Psionics Handbook* shows bonus points for psions. I created a 10th-level psion who happened to have an 18 in the primary attribute. The table suggests that a 10th-level psion would receive no bonus points, a "–" is shown. This seems unfair, for it would mean the character had to give up 7 bonus points when it moved from 8th to 9th level, for an 8th-level psion with an 18 attribute has a "7" shown. Is that the intention of the chart?

No. Add up everything on the line for the ability score in question (see page 8 in the *Psionics Handbook*). A psion with a primary attribute of 18 gets 16 bonus power points if the character is 7th-level or higher.

There are no lists of the powers available to the prestige classes in the *Psionics Handbook*. Is this an omission or is it assumed that they simply continue to discover powers from their previous list or lists?

The prestige classes in the *Psionics Handbook* use the psion power list.

Do psionic attacks provoke attacks of opportunity? What about defenses? The *Psionics Handbook* is vague on this point. If they do, how do you determine the DC for Concentration checks that are required when a psionic creature suffers damage from an attack of opportunity?

Psionic powers and psionic attacks are spell-like abilities and they provoke attacks of opportunity just as other spell-like abilities do. Psionic defenses are also spell-like, but they do not provoke attacks of opportunity.

For the Concentration DC for psionic abilities, use the Concentration skill description from page 19 of the *Psionics Handbook*. If the power in question is an attack mode and the DC has a level-based component, use the following values (which are derived from the attack modes' power point costs): *mind thrust* 1, *ego whip* 2, *id insinuation* 2, *psychic*

crush 3, *mind blast* 5.

For example, a character uses *mind blast* and provokes an attack of opportunity that hits and inflicts 10 points of damage. The Concentration DC is 25 (base of 10 + 10 for the damage dealt + 5 for *mind thrust's* effective level.)

Most of the prestige classes in the *Psionics Handbook* have a prerequisite of a certain number of base power points each day, which does not include bonus power points. Do power points from the Inner Strength feat count as bonus power points or base power points?

The Inner Strength feat provides bonus power points, not base power points.

Are the *skate, see sound, psychofeedback*, and *improved vigor* powers available to psychic warriors? The first three powers aren't included on the psychic warrior list, but their descriptions say they're psychic warrior powers. The *improved vigor* power is on the psychic warrior list, but psychic warrior isn't mentioned in the power description.

All four of these powers are available to psychic warriors. **This is official errata.**

Is a character who has been affected by the 9th-level power *apopsi* (permanently lose 1d4 psionic powers), now able to learn 1d4 new psionic powers? In other words, does the use of *apopsi* erase a character's discovered power slots, free up those power slots, seal off the mind's access to those powers, or does something else happen? How does *psychic chirurgery* restore these powers? Does it reimprint the mind with the erased powers? Does it unseal the mind's access to the erased powers? Would someone using *psychic chirurgery* need to know the erased powers in order to restore them?

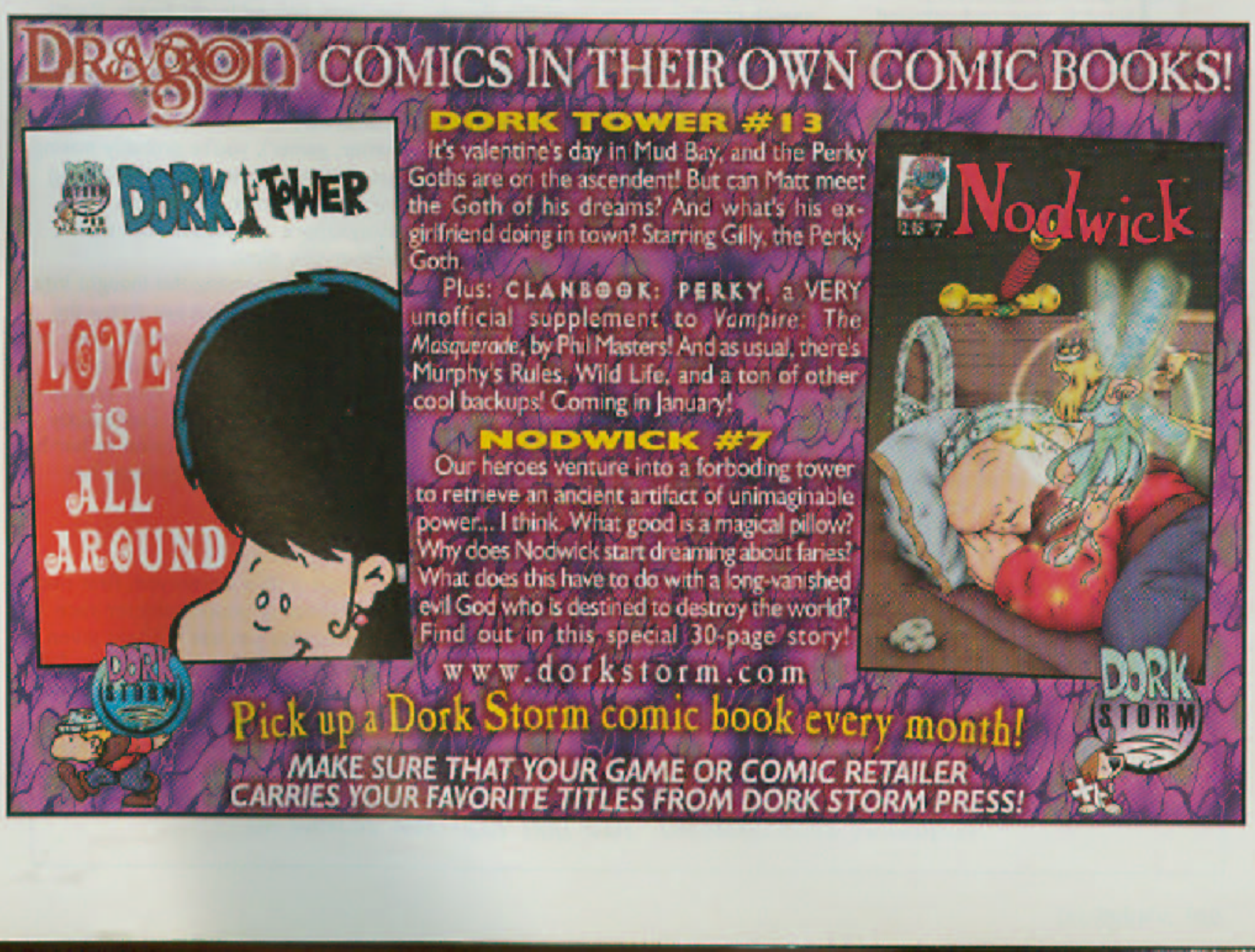
The powers and the slots they once occupied become inaccessible to the character (they're still there, but they're useless). If the character gains a level, the erased powers still count against the total number of powers the character can know.

Psychic chirurgery simply restores access to the inaccessible powers; the person using *psychic chirurgery* doesn't need to know the erased powers to make the repair.

Page 140 of the *Psionics Handbook* says that because undead have no Constitution scores, they cannot use psychometabolic powers. However, on page 8 it shows that the score tied to psychometabolism is Strength. Is one of these entries an error? Constitution governs psychokinesis. Are undead creatures banned from both disciplines?

Undead creatures cannot use psychometabolic powers (they don't have any metabolisms).

However, an undead creature can use psychokinesis powers despite its lack of Constitution. It uses its Charisma score as the key ability score when manifesting psychokinesis powers.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THE PLAY'S THE THING

by Robin D. Laws • illustrated by John Kovalic

Breaking the Mold

DM | [as the despicable Imperial minister, Ferrinax] You will do what I tell you, pusillanimous dwarf. Else I shall send this scroll to your underground home, dishonoring your name for generations!

YOU | Is that so?

DM | Admit it, Molan. You serve as my pawn now!

One of the easiest ways to evaluate the quality of a book, movie, or roleplaying session is to search for clichés. We're trained to see the use of clichés as a bad thing. We expect the characters and situations in great works of art to rise above cliché. Yet, especially in the realm of escapist entertainment, most of us take secret pleasure when certain standard elements appear. I might like the plucky everyman hero type; you might dig ninjas. Really effective clichés speak to something deeply rooted in us, and some critics and psychologists distinguish them from ordinary stereotypes by calling them archetypes.

In roleplaying games, clichés are a good thing. Assisted by the D&D rules, DMs and players together create the storylines of their games as they go along. Clichés act as a sort of shorthand that allows everybody to work from a common set of assumptions. If the party enters a vale of gnomes in search of allies, and most of the players have read up on gnome culture, they can immediately proceed to interact with the NPCs without the DM having to spout a long explanatory monologue. Gnomes are already alive in their minds. Clichés act as a sort of back-up generator for your imagination.

Start with a Stereotype

When you first start out as a roleplaying gamer, it's best to stick to the stereotypes. Each D&D character draws on at least two stereotypes: race and class. (Multiclass characters partake of multiple stereotypes. Alignment can provide a third stereotype to work from.) You know the drill: Dwarves are taciturn and driven by family honor; barbarians are ale-guzzling, axe-swinging wild men, and so on. The basic descriptions in the *Player's Handbook* are all vivid, fun stereotypes. Think of these as training wheels. By the time you're interested in reading columns like this, though, it's time for the wheels to come off.

We also use stereotypes in real life to categorize people from different places and cultures. This habit can trip us up in a big way by tempting us to bigotry. Most of us, though, know better than to expect real-life individuals we meet to conform to the stereotypes we carry around in our heads. Rarely do we meet someone who seems average or typical in every way. If you say someone is a typical New Yorker (or southerner, or Californian, or, for that matter, gamer), you're probably making fun of him for being a sort of walking cartoon character. Real people are always more complicated than such stereotypes allow.

When incorporating this thought into your roleplaying, don't just throw the cliché out the window. Instead, draw on it as a hidden power source to bring instant zip to your PC. If your character seems a little flat, you can quickly and effectively add dimension to her by showing how she deviates from her stereotype.

Breaking Away

To depart from a stereotype, first find a description of your character race and class. You can use the text given in the *Player's Handbook*, or you can find a lengthier description in a sourcebook or *DRAGON* article. Longer articles give you more to go on, but they increase the chance that you'll focus on a minor element of the type instead of its main

points. You might want to photocopy the description so you can highlight bits of text or make marginal notes without ruining your copy of the book or magazine. Keeping in mind our general rule that one simple idea is stronger than many complicated ones, highlight a single trait for your PC to contradict. (Although at first it seems that your PC will differ from the stereotype in just one important way, you'll find that making this single change tells you a lot of other things about her, including further ways in which she differs from the norm.)

When looking for the one aspect to change, consider the likelihood that it will come up in your campaign. If your DM concentrates on dungeon-crawling, it won't make much difference for you to focus on your PC's political attitudes. Conversely, a bard's unusual indifference to ancient artifacts won't be an issue in a campaign that focuses on military events.

The easiest choice to make is simply to de-emphasize an aspect you don't like anyway. Perhaps you want to play a dwarf because you like their toughness of character and grim battle-cries. The idea of being obligated to a clan bothers you, though, because you always like to play footloose loners who aren't impeded by a sense of duty to others. The advantage of this approach is that it makes the character more emotionally appealing to you. The disadvantage is that the DM and other players might see your dwarf as just a carbon-copy of your past characters. Whether this is a serious disadvantage depends on how highly you value originality and diversity.

Players who want to portray a different character each time out might take the opposite tack, targeting for elimination the element they usually emphasize. Maybe you've always favored elves because you like their mystical beliefs and dedication to nature. You can shake up the group dynamic by playing a hard-headed elf who'd sooner prowl the streets of a large city than trample around in meadows and briars.

You'd don't have to get too analytical about your choice, though. Most players using this method will just look at the description until an intriguing idea pops out at them. If inspiration truly deserts you, you could even randomly jab the description with a pencil and see what you happen to land on.

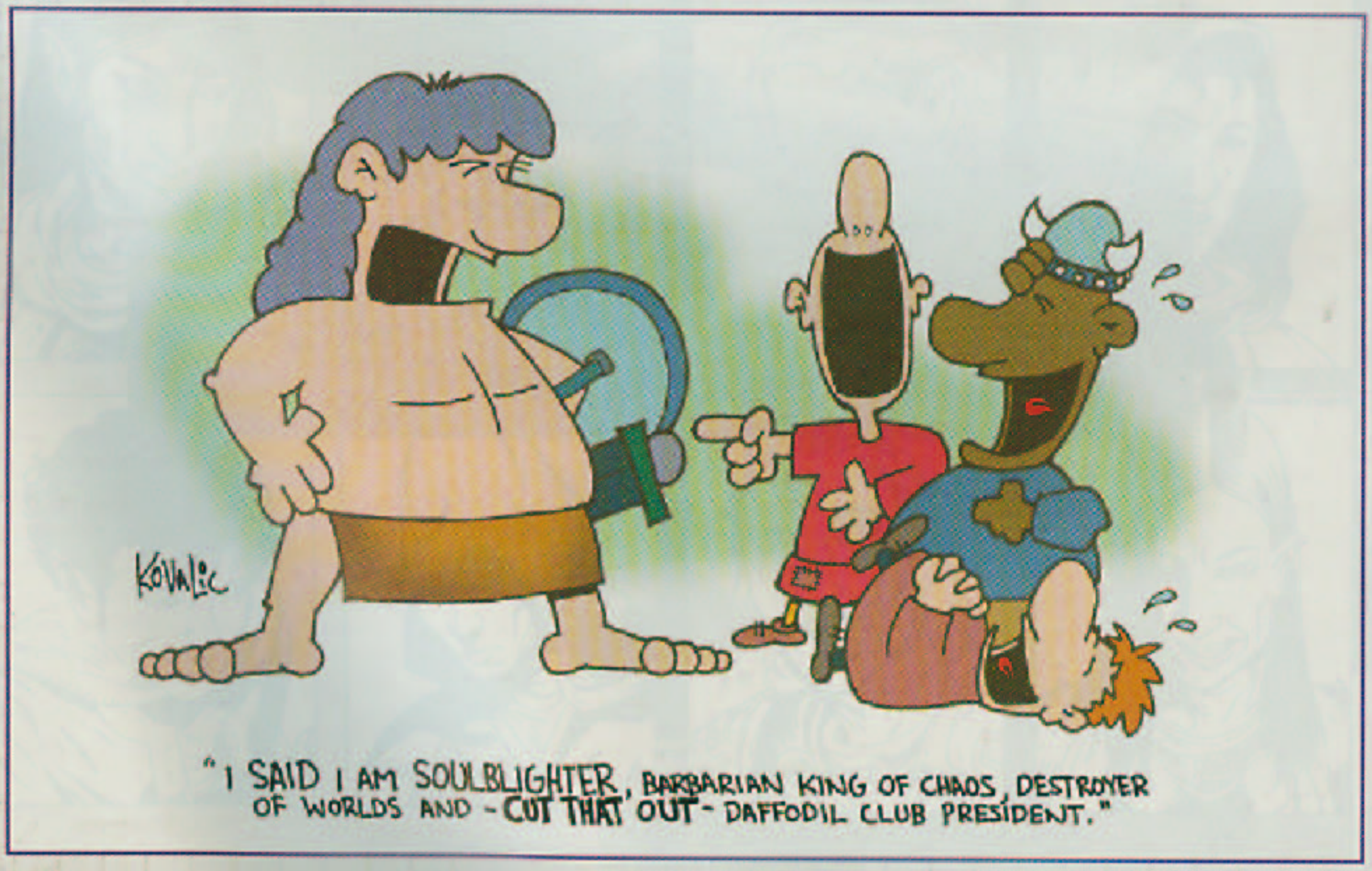
Here's another twist: Instead of finding an aspect to ignore, pick one to exaggerate. People distinguish themselves from the norm not only by the values they reject but also by the ones they trumpet. Perhaps your dwarf character is obsessed with her clan's honor, making every decision by asking herself how best to enhance it. Your elf is considered especially mystically attuned, even by the standards of her race. Your barbarian is still up roistering and looking for enemies to raid when her clan-mates have long since passed out.

When exaggerating a feature, take care not to make the character so extreme that she annoys the other members of the play group. She shouldn't be so obsessed that she can't find a way to grasp the standard plot hooks the DM tosses your way.

Playing the Type

However you decide to differentiate your character from the stereotype, your next step is to find ways to play up her new traits during the game. You might even find they give you a tactical advantage, as the PC's enemies, blinded by stereotype, fail to predict her next move. At the very least, she'll surprise the DM, your fellow players—and, if all goes well, you.

YOU | You assume too much, Ferrinax. This dwarf cares more for vengeance than for honor! Have at you! D



WIZARDS WORKSHOP

PC PORTRAITS

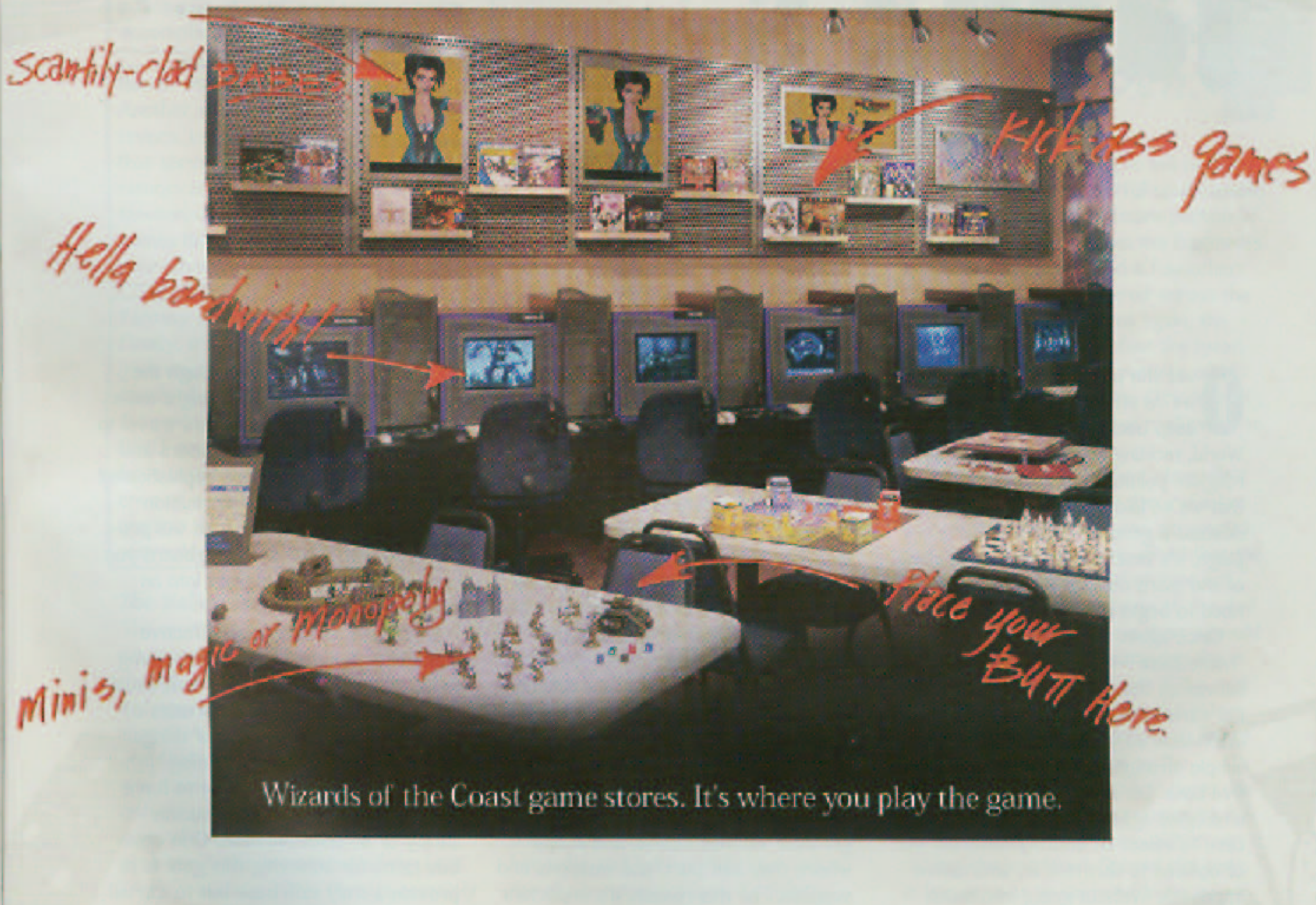
illustrated by Peter Bergting

What's great about the new halflings is that they are rougher and grittier, so I tried to make as many of the sketches as rugged as possible. These are small, bad-tempered, and unshaven characters you wouldn't push around in your local bar. My inspiration is deeply rooted in '70's hard rock and it rubbed off on some of the characters (I especially like the sideburns). One of the characters is actually based on a photo of me, but you'll have to guess which one. (Hint: it's not that hard.)

—Peter Bergting

If you build it, they will come.

WE BUILT IT!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WIZARDS WORKSHOP

DUNGEONCRAFT

by Ray Winninger

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Janda's Valley

Every month, "Dungeoncraft" explores the fine art of Dungeon Mastering and offers a behind-the-scenes look at the development of an actual D&D campaign. If you've missed any of the previous installments of "Dungeoncraft," you can find them online at www.wizards.com/dragon.

Over the past six months or so, we've effectively fleshed out the deep background of the Lost World, tackling such basic issues as religion, politics, and geography. Now that we've laid a solid foundation and devised a general "feel" for the campaign, it's time to start designing some of the more concrete resources we need to begin play.

Once again, let's begin by creating a "home base"—the town or village that serves as the adventurers' home during the early phases of the campaign. Back in *DRAGON* #258, we considered a few simple strategies for creating an effective base. Let's employ those same strategies again this time around, taking care to select an entirely different set of options to illustrate an alternative approach. Without going into much detail (since you can read the whole of the earlier piece for yourself online), a brief recap of the ingredients of an effective base is in order.

In short, the main function of the home base is to provide the adventurers with a safe haven to which they can retire between adventures. Remember, good adventures tend to tax the adventuring party to its limits. Unless there is a relatively safe sanctuary in which the party can regroup and lick its wounds, it's unlikely they will survive for long. It's also important to note that the safety of their home base gives the players an opportunity to let their hair down and spend some quality time roleplaying. After all, it's hard to be a jovial dwarf or a gnome prankster when your character is in constant mortal danger.

The second most important function of a good home base is to provide the players with the infrastructure they need to tackle their adventures. Even the strongest and bravest adventurers need access to temples where they can get their wounds healed, and shops where they can purchase weapons and supplies. For this reason, it's important to make sure that the home base is well-stocked with these types of resources. It's also important to give some thought to which goods and services you want to offer for sale in your home base and which you want to force the players to leave the comforts of the base to obtain. Although you should offer a good selection of weapons and equipment through the local shops, for instance, it might make sense to make the adventurers travel to a nearby city (risking encounters and adventure) to obtain more sophisticated armor and weapons or information about magic items. This tactic will provide you with a handy springboard you can use to draw the players into an interesting adventure.

Of course, designing an effective home base for the Lost World is going to be a bit more challenging than usual. One of the defining characteristics of the Lost World is the sense of danger that permeates the whole setting. Somehow, this mood is going to have to be reconciled with the requisite safety of an effective base. One obvious tactic for achieving this goal is to provide a truly safe base but to curtail the goods and services offered within, forcing the players to frequently venture out into the world.

In addition to its two main functions, there are a few additional characteristics of a home base that we've already identified:

Local Authority
The relative safety of the home base implies that there's some sort of force that guards the base and keeps it safe. This usually implies that there is a local authority of some type that controls the army of peacekeepers. This is important to note, since we'll have to make sure to define this authority as part of the process of designing the base.

Townsfolk
Throughout the campaign, we're going to need to introduce new NPCs, both to serve as springboards into adventures and to give the players someone to interact with. A base that plays host to a nice mix of locals and visitors helps accomplish this goal.

Rumor Mill
Another staple of the home base is the tavern, inn, or other gathering place that serves as the local source of rumors and gossip. Again, such a mechanism will prove invaluable when it comes time to interest the players in new adventures.

Fantasy Element
Finally, it's fun to make sure that you give every town, city, or base some touch of the fantastic, just to reinforce the epic, otherworldly flavor of the D&D game. These touches can range from magical structures to the presence of a fantastic creature in the base itself to the existence of a spell or curse that effects the entire area.

The Valley Sanctuary

The typical home base is a town, city, or stronghold. For the Lost World, though, we'll adopt a somewhat different approach. We've already decided that the world is relatively uncivilized and that permanent towns and cities are quite rare, since it is difficult to defend such structures from the ravages of the outside world. Another problem is the segregation of the Lost World's society. While there is certainly interaction between the various races and tribes described in the earlier installments, let's suppose that each tribe lives in its own self-contained community, reinforcing the idea that the tribe is the most highly evolved political structure on the planet. This characteristic makes it especially challenging to create a meaningful base that can serve as a home to all the characters, since we don't want to force the players to create characters who all hail from the same tribe or race. After all, the D&D game works best when there is a great deal of variety in the adventuring party.

The ideal home base, therefore, is a construct that somehow stands outside the tribal structure—a unique community that welcomes members of all the various tribes without declaring allegiance to any of them. It is also housed in an unusually defensible setting or structure, explaining its permanence and relative security. At the same time, it offers a limited set of goods and services, forcing the players to frequently venture out into the world.

The main function of the home base is to provide the adventurers with a safe haven.

Here's a solution that neatly fills half of the bill—a tiny valley that can be sealed off and easily defended from raiders and encroaching dinosaurs by a relatively small number of soldiers. Such a structure seems like a perfect home for one of the Lost World's rare permanent outposts of civilization, but we still need to figure out just how this setting fits in with the political situation. What if the valley sanctuary were the domain of a single powerful individual who doesn't owe allegiance to any particular tribe? This individual allows outsiders to dwell inside the valley retreat, coming and going as they please, so long as the outsiders obey a strict set of rules. Starting with this idea, let's create a character to fulfill this role.

About forty or fifty years ago, a powerful Solaani sorceress named Janda had a falling out with the rest of her tribe and led her followers out of the elven strongholds in the hills to form their own community in a nearby valley. Before beginning her self-imposed exile, Janda was one of the elders of the Solaani tribe and something of a hero among her people. Although most of the Solaani believe that Janda departed because the tribal leaders wouldn't permit her to share Solaani lore with outsiders, the other tribal elders know the truth: Janda left just before she would have been involuntarily exiled for heresy. Like all Solaani elders, Janda knows that all the members of the Solaani, the Inuundi, and the various human tribes are actually mind fragments of the great god of light who ruled over the Lost World several centuries ago and is now deceased (see *Dragon* #283 for details).

A few years before she left her tribe, Janda started to have strange dreams that proved difficult for anyone to interpret. Ultimately, she realized that the dreams were trying to tell her that she could work a powerful spell capable of reassembling a significant portion of the light god's mind from the fragments embedded in herself and a few other "attuned" Solaani scattered across the Lost World. Once he lives again, the elder god could then defeat the tyrannosaurs that house the remains of his ancient enemy (again, see *Dragon* #283 for details) and bring true civilization to the Lost World.

The other elders of the Solaani find Janda's ideas dangerous for a number of reasons. Even if she can accomplish her aims, the Solaani are afraid that the reappearance of the god of light will only lead to a reappearance of the god of darkness, igniting anew their age-old conflict and possibly destroying the Lost World altogether. Even if the god of darkness does not arise, the elders fear that the planet's inhabitants might be forced to live in thrall to the reawakened god of light. For these reasons, the Solaani elders refused to aid Janda and forbid her from either contacting the scattered Solaani she sees in her dreams or undertaking a quest to unearth the ancient lore necessary to devise the great spell.

As a consequence, Janda and a handpicked band of loyal followers vacated the elven fort in the hills and built their own stronghold in a narrow valley located nearby. There, they work to locate the remaining "attuned" Solaani and craft the spell necessary to

DEAR DUNGEONCRAFT

I appreciated your recent advice on how to create adventures. It led me to recognize my one great failing as a DM:

I'm terrible at developing the "hooks" that lead the players into their adventures.

Every one of my adventures seems to begin like this, "A guy walks up to you in an inn and offers you 500 gold pieces if you'll . . ." My players are really getting tired of it. Can you offer any advice?

—Boring in Birmingham

DEAR BORING,

As in all matters creative, I'm afraid there is no simple "how-to" formula for designing effective hooks. Some people have the knack for this sort of thing and some don't.

That said, this sort of design is quite a bit simpler than it appears to be. Usually, all it takes is a little practice and a nice collection of positive examples and you'll soon be off and running. Your first stop, therefore, is our sister publication *DUNGEON Magazine*. At a mere six bucks a copy, *DUNGEON* represents one of the best values in all of gaming. Each month, you'll find several complete adventures, each with a pretty good hook of its own. You should find it pretty easy either to steal these hooks outright for your own creations or to use them as templates for hooks of your own. After you make your way through a couple of complete issues, you'll probably get a feel for what your players do and don't respond to, effectively solving your problem.

You might also try designing adventures that are a little larger in scope, and thus a little longer. That way, you'll have to invent hooks less frequently.

reawaken the god of light. So far, Janda and her people have been pursuing their mission for more than fifty years, and there are still several years remaining before the work will be complete. All this time, the exiles and the Solaani have been content to leave each other alone, though the tension between them can only start to grow once Janda nears the completion of her goal. Most of the Solaani elders believe that some sort of open conflict is inevitable.

Because she is a kind and compassionate person, Janda has opened her valley stronghold to anyone who wants to live among her people. As a result, hundreds of merchants and disenfranchised members of all the various tribes in the region have taken up residence in the valley. All who live in the stronghold agree to abide by a strict set of laws drafted by Janda herself and enforced by the impressive array of soldiers who are at her command. For the most part, these laws are designed to keep the peace and promote goodwill, though there are a couple of unusual provisions in the code as well. Particularly worthy of mention is a law that requires anyone entering the stronghold to pay a full 30 percent of the wealth they are carrying (coins, jewels, or trade goods) as a tax. Janda uses this money to feed and clothe the poor and to support the army that defends the stronghold. This law will accomplish our aim of forcing the players to spend as little time in the home base as necessary. If they are forced to give 30 percent of their wealth every time they enter Janda's valley, the characters probably can't afford to run back to the base after every encounter.

Needless to say, only a handful of the valley's residents are aware of Janda's real mission. Even among her own followers, only the eldest and most trusted know exactly what the exiles are hoping to achieve. As such, most of Janda's story qualifies as a "secret" as defined by the Second Rule of Dungeoncraft.

All in all, this setup should be particularly effective for a number of reasons: It gives us an interesting home base that can credibly claim a wide variety of residents, and it's structured in a way that urges the players to travel often and explore—simply visiting any of the region's tribes for consultation forces the players to leave the stronghold and undertake a wilderness trek across the Lost World. Best of all, Janda's backstory provides us with a springboard we can use to launch adventures and a handy storyline that might come to define a later stage in the campaign. Will she and her followers accomplish their aim? If so, what happens next? Finally, what does Kor the tyrannosaur god think of all this?

Along these last lines, here's just a bit more background that might prove useful. Janda's story begs an obvious question: What's so special about her? Why does she alone among all the Solaani experience the dreams and hear the call of the light god? Before we answer this question, remember that when the light god perished, his consciousness was shattered into millions of pieces, which eventually became the Solaani and all the other intelligent mammalian races on the planet. Today, each of these living beings embodies a tiny piece of the light god's mind. What makes Janda and her fellow "attuned" Solaani different, let's say, is that they actually sprung from the portion of the god's mind that housed and generated his dreams. Since dreams don't require the conscious mind to flourish, these dreams have managed to live on even after the god's apparent death. After several generations of various Solaani families, the dreams are now manifesting themselves once again and leaving their current owners with an irresistible urge to regroup to bring the light god's dream self back into being. This is worth mentioning since an important aspect of the light god is actually able to communicate with Janda through her dreams, perhaps providing a useful means of touching off adventures or providing the players with some timely exposition.

Next month, let's develop Janda's valley in some detail (more than we applied to Aris' Ironoak stronghold back in issue #261) to provide a good example of a fully fleshed-out home base.

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by Mike McVey

Finishing

So far in this series we've looked at a wide variety of subjects, from step-by-step guides to some of the rudimentary techniques like dry-brushing, to painting monsters and fabulous beasts. This month we're going to look at the last steps you take when painting a miniature—finishing. Finishing includes all the chores that aren't actually miniature painting techniques but are, in their own way, vital to the way a finished miniature looks. The three most obvious finishing tasks are **final assembly**, **basing**, and **varnishing**. Let's take a look at each of them in turn.

Final Assembly

When you buy miniatures and take them out of the blister or box, much of the time they will come in two or more pieces. (We looked at assembly in detail earlier in the series.) In most cases, the best way to tackle these multipart models is to assemble them completely before you begin painting. In some cases, it's easier to paint one or more of the pieces separately and join them together when you're finished. One of the most obvious cases of this choice is when a miniature has a separate shield. If you glue the shield onto the miniature straight away, you will usually block a significant part of the figure and make painting the miniature considerably harder. In this case, it is far better to paint the shield and the miniature individually and attach the shield later. You will also find that the shield is easier to paint effectively as its own piece. The decision comes down to common sense really: Just look at the different pieces and judge for yourself which, if any, to paint separately. If a piece blocks other parts of the miniature, it's a good candidate.

There are a few things to keep in mind if you decide to paint your miniature in parts. The best approach is to clean them all and make sure that they fit together snugly. If you want to pin them together, drill the holes and glue a long piece of wire into the piece you are painting separately—that gives you something to hold onto while painting. You might prefer to hold the wire in a pin-vice, letting you keep your fingers well out of the way. When the painting is finished, just snip the wire off to the correct length and glue the pieces together. You will always have to touch up around the joint, but make sure the glue is fully dry before you do—there is no quicker way to ruin a brush than by getting super-glue on the bristles.

Shields are almost always better painted away from the miniature. Attach them to a small piece of card with double-sided tape; that way they are easy to remove when finished. If the back is going to be visible when attached, paint it first, then flip the shield over and paint the front. Shields usually cover some of the surface of the miniature, and some people anticipate this by not painting this area. You might prefer to paint the miniature completely and then attach the shield; that way, if you decide to remove the shield for any reason, the miniature is fully painted underneath.

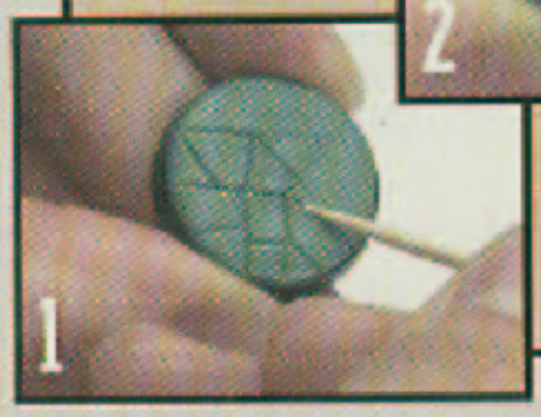
Basing

Setting the miniature on a good base is an often-neglected area of miniature painting, and some people do it almost as an afterthought. In fact, basing is as

CONSTRUCT YOUR DETAIL

1 Use putty to create a good texture for any special location you'd like to suggest. Flagstone, large rocks, and evocative objects like skulls are good.

2 Paint your base and attach the miniature using pins.



FLOCK THE BASE

1 Cover the base with a thin layer of glue.

2 Dip the miniature completely into the flock tray.

3 Shake off the excess and you're done!

START COLLECTING

Keep a nice array of flock handy to add variety to your miniatures.

important as any other stage of the process. You'll be letting all your hard work on the rest of the miniature go to waste if you present it on a badly planned and poorly finished base. There are really no ends to the different ways you can base your miniature. We'll look at just a few of them here.

Standard Basing

There are a couple of straightforward ways you can finish of the base on a miniature. The first is to use scenic flock—fine sawdust that has been dyed. Flock is used mainly for railway or scenic modeling, and you can find it in any good hobby shop. There are lots of different colors of flock available, generally in natural shades of green or brown, so you can choose which best suits the miniature.

First, paint a layer of white glue on the top of the base, then cover it in flock. Even though white glue is water soluble, always use an old brush and wash it thoroughly after use. When applying the glue, be careful that you don't get any on the model's feet or the sides of the base. Otherwise, the flock will stick to them too. If you do manage to glue some flock where you don't want it, make sure you remove it right away.

You can also use fine sand, then paint the sand. The technique is the same: Simply apply the glue to the top of the base and cover it in sand. You might like to keep the sand in a shallow container and just dip the base into it. You need to let the sand dry thoroughly before you can paint it. Once it's dry, you can get all sorts of good effects. If you want it to look like grass, just paint it mid green, and then delicately drybrush it with lighter shades.

The sides of the base can also be painted, and again this is mainly a matter of taste. I prefer black or very dark green, the color of the basing material and the general feel of the model might influence your decision. Sometime the base will have little molding marks on the side; just make sure these are trimmed off and the sides are neat and even before you apply paint.

Scenic Basing

A great way to add a little character and originality to a miniature is to put it on a scenic base. It's good fun too.

There is no end to what you can do. As with so many aspects of the painting hobby, it pays to think about the character of the miniature you are painting. For example, it's no good covering the base of a subterranean monster with grass-green flock; it would be far more in character to create a dungeon atmosphere. If you are basing a wood elf, what you really want is some foliage to put the model in context.

At a basic level, you can use both flock and sand to create a broken, more natural feel. Just paint glue over part of the base and cover it in flock, then repeat the process with sand. Another alternative is to use static grass; this is similar to flock but is made of tiny fibers that stand upright when glued to a base. They look almost like real grass.

If you decide to put a little more effort into your bases, the best place to start is in your local hobby or modeling store, especially those that cater to railway modelers. If you look at the shelves, you'll find all sorts of things that look great on the bases of your miniatures.

FINISHED MINIATURES LOOK GREAT!

Your finished miniatures become a great addition to any game session.

Varnishing

The final stage of miniature painting is varnishing. While it's not exactly a painting technique, it's a vital stage in the process that protects all your hard work. The easiest method is to use a spray varnish. I prefer to give the miniature a coat of gloss first, which gives great protection, then a covering of matte varnish to get rid of the shine. Make sure you let the varnish dry thoroughly between coats or it won't come out non-reflective. Some miniatures look good if you selectively gloss parts of them. For example, you can make parts of the armor look like they have been lacquered, or make the fangs of a monster glisten. To do this, you need to buy paint-on gloss varnish and add it to those parts when the rest of the model has been protected in a matte finish.

Next month, "Role Models" changes tack as we'll begin looking at the new miniatures game *Dungeons & Dragons: Chainmail!*

by Johnn Four

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The Encounter Checklist

Encounters are the building blocks of your campaign. In bite-sized pieces they unfold your story, reveal the game world, challenge the characters, and thoroughly engage your players. However, if you viewed encounters as glasses of water, you would find that most of them are only half-full. In other words, your group only receives half of the benefit that your encounters could offer.

Most published modules do a great job of sprucing up standard dungeon and wilderness settings. However, designers have no way to customize the adventure to your campaign.

On the other hand, creating your own adventures lets you customize *every* encounter to your campaign. It can require a lot of work, though, and you might not have the time for planning detailed settings and descriptions, individual character growth, and game-world revelations.

The good news is that individual encounters can do double duty. The bad news is that you have time for only a limited number of encounters in each session, so make the most out of each one. Squeeze every last drop of excitement, entertainment, and campaign value from them that you can.

Brief Preparation

Before your next game session, photocopy the checklists from this article and slip them in your *Dungeon Master's Guide* or clip them onto your DM's screen. Reference them during the game for inspiration, idea generation, and a reminder to pack lots of good stuff into each encounter.

Before you run an encounter, quickly scan the checklists and look for ways to include something extra from one or more of the categories. Keep a pen and a pad of paper handy to jot down ideas as they come to you. Turn those ideas into your own lists to use during your next session.

Enhance the Setting

Varied and unusual encounter settings are inspiring, and even small details can make lackluster places memorable. Tweak every encounter you run so that your session doesn't become a series of boring rooms or roadside ambushes.

During the game, look ahead at your next likely encounter, check its setting, and decide how you can enhance some aspect such as lighting, footing, or the number of challenges. Use the checklists for ideas if you get stuck. Be careful not to add details that could significantly distract players or bog your session down with needless investigation or speculation.

For example, you look ahead and see the next encounter is a bugbear guardroom. The room is pretty boring as it stands, so you decide to add pieces of damaged furniture that the creatures have scrounged up to make their shifts more comfortable. When the PCs crash through the door, you describe the room and mention that the party has caught a group of bugbears lounging on divans, couches, and stuffed chairs. This detail adds interest by making the encounter slightly humorous, and it could even provide some props during a combat (cushions, pillows, and chairs to throw or hide behind).

On the other hand, it could be a mistake to add a large chest covered with gold, filigreed lettering for the monsters to use as a table. After the battle, the PCs would be drawn to investigate the chest, taking game time to check for traps and then searching the heck out of it for secret compartments after they discover it's empty. They'll say, "It must be important because the DM specifically mentioned it; keep searching!" Make sure your added details become enhancements, not distractions.

World Development

Players enjoy exploring and discovering your game world through their characters' eyes rather than through direct DM-to-player exposition. They also find it rewarding when something they learned in-character a few encounters ago becomes important in the current session. This sort of development makes your campaign seem more

INDOOR LOCATIONS

- Small tunnels or vents for air circulation
- Flooded area, perhaps filled with an unusual liquid
- Large, turning fan in the floor, wall or ceiling
- Moving elevator
- Siege equipment storage or construction area
- Walls or floor covered in interesting tapestries or rugs
- Interesting or unusual furnishings or containers
- Craftsman's chambers with interesting tools
- Strange laboratory with unusual equipment
- Magical lake, pool, or fountain

NATURAL LIGHTING

- Strobing
- Flickering
- Sunset
- Glowing
- Sparkling
- Bonfire bright
- Glowing color
- Bizarre pattern
- Bright, narrow shafts
- Phosphorescence

OUTDOOR LOCATIONS

- Beautiful garden
- Grove of unusual trees
- Ship in dry dock, or foundered and washed ashore
- Burned forest
- Moving cart
- Edge of a cliff, ledge, or river
- Narrow, perilous bridge
- Waterwheel or windmill
- Deserted town or village
- Construction site

WEATHER EFFECTS

- Strangely shaped or colored clouds
- Thick mist
- Hot and dry
- Lightning storm
- Hail
- Hard rain
- Fresh breeze
- Small flood or rising waters
- Humid and cloying
- Bizarre weather in the distance (tornado, cyclone, ball lightning)

TEN CHALLENGE VARIATIONS

- Multiple foes (different types or distinct groups)
- Time limit
- Dangerous weather
- Precarious location
- Magical danger or barrier
- Rising water, lava, or acid
- Poisonous or dangerous gas
- Dangerous footing
- Moving walls, floor, or ceiling
- Competitors

TEN FOOTING IDEAS

- Deep puddles
- Loose gravel
- Muddy
- Steep slope
- Pot holes
- Deep sand
- Mosaic tiles
- Thistle patch
- Thick moss
- Snakes, spiders, or scorpions

TEN WAYS TO CONVEY WORLD DETAIL

- Rumors and gossip by NPCs during idle chatter
- Myths and legends shown in art, pottery, dishes, tapestries, rugs, stained glass, frescoes, or mosaics
- Comments, curses, and colloquial expressions made by the NPCs
- Books, scrolls, diaries, and letters found in the area
- Clues revealed in songs sung by a busy craftsman or bard in the background
- The names of people, towns, streets, tavern menu items, local rivers, songs, and poems
- Overheard conversations
- Public events, local customs, or old religious rituals whose hidden meanings represent real facts
- Town crier or discarded proclamation notice
- NPCs asking questions that reveal things the characters don't know

WORLD DETAIL TOPICS

- Monster lore (facts and hints about upcoming monsters)
- Politics, economics, and power structure (facts and rumors about NPC motives)
- Customs and rituals of local cults and whole societies
- Geographical lore
- Interesting facts about NPCs—especially villains—who are important to the region or to the PC group
- Goals and plots of NPCs, monsters, and nations
- Fauna and flora lore (such as useful plants or venomous animals)
- History and legends
- Lore about deities and their religion
- Tidbits about the daily life of commoners in the region

authentic and alive, and all future information that the characters glean becomes more important to the players.

Your encounters already develop your world to some degree, as the PCs learn about new monster abilities, evil NPC spells, and magic item powers. However, this game information is usually gained from direct confrontation or after-the-fact, and it lacks that exciting "aha!" feeling when the players put together previously learned facts with their present situation. The solution is to add small world details into your encounters ahead of time.

For example, let's say your PCs defeat a goblin clan and venture further underground until umber hulks ambush them. There they discover the umber hulks' special *confusion* gaze ability after several characters fail their saving throws. The players groan.

In an alternative scenario, you decide to add some primitive cave drawings to the goblin encounter. These crude paintings depict scenes of strange, clawed creatures zapping goblins with rays from their eyes. Further along, the PCs find scenes in which goblins with big round eyes are attacking each other and bumping into walls. Little goblin skulls have been drawn throughout the paintings. After discovering this foreshadowing clue, the PCs venture warily onward until they encounter the umber hulks. Now, the players who logically connect the paintings with the monsters can shout a warning, and everyone will derive more satisfaction from the encounter.

If your players learn about your world through DM monologue or player—rather than character—handouts rather than through encounters, then the burden is on them to figure out how their characters came by that knowledge. In addition, you can avoid awkward character-knowledge vs. player-knowledge conflicts by sprinkling game world information, hints, and clues into your encounters on a regular basis.

Encounters can be far more than a sequence of rooms, caves, or wilderness areas that lead characters to the climax of an adventure. While you plan or run encounters, always keep an eye out for ways to enhance them so that players can learn a little more about their character or your game world. It also helps to enhance boring encounters by emphasizing some element of the area, such as lighting, footing, location, number of challenges, or weather. Think of encounters as multi-purpose DM's tools, and wield those that you have time for to create the most exciting and entertaining session possible.

Dragon Mirth

Got a good one?
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PVP
by Scott Kurtz
YOU WANT TO PLAY A NEW CHARACTER? BUT WE ALREADY STARTED THE CAMPAIGN. WHY DIDN'T YOU MENTION THIS EARLIER?
HONESTLY? I WAS A LITTLE EMBARRASSED TO SHOW IT TO YOU.
LET ME SEE. VALERIE, THE BARBARIAN CHIEFTESS... OH FRANCIS.
I WANT TO PLAY A FEMALE CHARACTER. DOES THAT MAKE ME A FREAK?
OF COURSE NOT FRANCIS, IT JUST MAKES YOU A NORMAL SIXTEEN YEAR OLD. NOW IF YOU'RE STILL PLAYING HER WHEN YOU'RE THIRTY...
OH! AH HA HA HA HA HA.
FOURTEEN YEARS LATER...
FRANCIS, I ASSUME YOU'LL BE PLAYING VALERIE AGAIN?
YEAH.
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YYYAAAA, I STARTED MY CLIMB TO THE TOP STANDING WATCH OVER A PHONE IN A CUBICLE JUST LIKE THIS ONE!
YYYAAAA, I STARTED MY CLIMB TO THE TOP STANDING WATCH OVER A CHEST IN A TEN-FOOT-BY-TEN-FOOT ROOM JUST LIKE THIS ONE!

Gunchello
EXPLAIN TO ME AGAIN WHY YOU'RE WRITING A BOOK?
SIMPLE. IF YOU READ SOMETHING IT MUST BE TRUE, RIGHT?
I SUPPOSE SO, BUT YOU'RE NOT READING, YOU'RE WRITING.
NOT ANYMORE. I'VE JUST FINISHED!
LET ME SEE THAT. "HOW GUNCHELLO BECAME RICH AND FAMOUS."
SEE? IF YOU READ IT, IT MUST BE TRUE!
I THINK THAT ONLY APPLIES TO BOOKS OTHER PEOPLE WRITE.
I FIGURED AS MUCH. THAT'S WHY I SIGNED YOUR NAME.

YOUR DWARF CLERIC TURNS HIS ZOMBIE TROGLODYTE.

HIS WAR APE SUDDENLY CHARGES

AND TRAMPLES HIM INTO THE DIRT.

BURNING A COMMAND POINT, YOUR WOOD ELF RANGER ATTEMPTS TO TAKE INITIATIVE.

THE WAR APE IS TOO FAST AND SAVAGES YOUR RANGER WITH A WELL-PLACED CRIT.

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DUNGEONS & DRAGONS CHAINMAIL

WHAT'S NEW
WITH PHIL AND DIXIE

HEY FOLKS- OUR TOPIC THIS MONTH IS **HALFLINGS**, AND WE'VE SCORED **QUITE** A COUP, BECAUSE TODAY OUR GUEST IS NONE OTHER THAN AUTHOR **J.R.R. TOLKIEN** HIMSELF!!

AND A GOOD THING TOO - AS IT'S OBVIOUS TO A JUKED OUT **DEAD** MAN THAT YOU DON'T KNOW DICK NIXON ABOUT **HALFLINGS!**

um... NO DOUBT. SO ORIGINALLY HALFLINGS WERE ANALOGOUS TO THE 'COMMON MAN'. WE IDENTIFIED WITH THEM AS THEY INTERACTED WITH MORE FANTASTIC CREATURES.

YEP - THE ORIGINAL JOE SIX-PACK, WHO JUST LIKES TO SIT ON HIS FURRY BUTT, **DRAGGED** INTO AN ADVENTURE - FALCON **HILARIOUS**, SURE, BUT **LOUSY** MARKETING.

WHAT?!

OH COME **ON** - ALL YOU GAMERS ARE MISANTHROPIC, GLUTTONOUS LITTLE COUCH POTATOES, BUT WHO WANTS TO **PLAY** ONE? NOW IN D and D THIRD EDITION, HALFLINGS ARE ALL PORTRAYED AS THIEVING LITTLE PSYCHOS WHO DRESS LIKE ADAM ANT. I THOROUGHLY APPROVE.

YOU DO?!

YOU BET! IN FACT, I HAVE A CHAINSAW-WIELDING HALFLING AS THE LEAD IN THE SEQUEL!

SEQUEL?! YOU WROTE A SEQUEL?!

SWEET, HUH? YOU SAW IT HERE FIRST, KIDS, SO START **BUYIN'!**

Ring Thief
J.R.R. TOLKIEN

BUT..! BUT..!

BEFORE YOU BLOW A VALVE, FANBOY, CHECK OUT HIS **DRIVERS LICENSE.**

HOW DID YOU-?

I PICKED HIS POCKET, FOOL.

22

JOE-BOB RALPH RALPH TOLKIEN?!

I **LOVED** 'VALLEY OF THE ORCS', BY THE WAY.

MMMMAYBE...

REALLY? MY **NEXT** BOOK IS TITLED 'GALADRIEL - ELF WITH A WHIP.' WANNA HELP ME WRITE THE ENDING?

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END!

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MMAFF!

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